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COMICS SCENE RETURNS shortly.
Look for **#34, on sale April 22, 1993.**

WORD BALLOONS

Black & White & Real

The first thing I noticed was the dead Superman on the wall. This guy was gone. Shattered. Pushing up Kryptonite daisies.

And hey, you know, it looked pretty swell. Original art always does. And there it was, artwork (both originals and photostats) from those pivotal issues last November in which the Man of Steel bought the big one (albeit not for forever and a day). Those pieces were bleeding all over the walls, hanging around just as if they were fine art and this was an art gallery or something.

Well, that's understandable. I was in Chicago at 23rd Century Artworks, the first (as far as we know) and perhaps only (thus far) art gallery fully showcasing comic book art. Animation art (original cels, re-created cel set-ups, prints, etc.) have long been available at individual galleries as well as at the Circle Gallery chain (which deals in works by Chuck Jones, Friz Freleng, Hanna-Barbera and others). Comic strip art is a sideline at some other galleries. And of course, various dealers sell everything—animation, comic strip and comic book originals—through the mail and at conventions.

But a *whole* art gallery devoted to the medium we love? This, I think, is something new. And it's something wonderful.

I hope all of you have a chance someday to take a look at the actual originals done for comic books, both for color comics and black-and-whites like the old Warren magazines. It's a real education, a chance to actually see inside the creative process and get a glimpse of how an artist did this or that.

Over the years, I've held in my hands a lot of original art, admiring and studying it. (And no, I don't actually own any, save for a great Dave Sim Cerebus illo done in 1978, and a very small ink sketch my pal Jim Steranko did of the Shadow a few years later).

Look at an early Marvel Jack Kirby page and, amidst the action, you can still read his notes under the panels, in the margins, pencilled there for all to see.

Gaze upon a Steve Ditko *Spider-Man* page. The excitement leaps off the page with Spidey. Curiously, it seems even more thrilling in black and white.

Or study the work of any other artist. See the levels of grey wash used to achieve suspense in some of those *Creepy* tales. Hey, wow, look at this, does this guy love zip-a-tone or what??? Here are doodles drawn in the margins, uninked pencil lines continuing the art outside the borders, white Liquid Paper splattered over solid India Ink blacks for a special effect.

And art corrections! This head was drawn by someone else and pasted onto the first artist's figure. Another panel has a photostat of an earlier image so the penciller didn't have to draw something again. Here are lettering corrections carefully rewording a caption and there, a page with the balloons on an overlay so as not to destroy any original art. Hmm, somebody spilled coffee here. Musta been the editor.

Whether it's a Carmine Infantino *Flash* splash page or a Rob Liefeld *Youngblood* cover, the original art is comic book history. And it's fascinating.

That's the kind of material you can find at 23rd Century Artworks (1407 West Irving Park Road, Chicago, IL 60613, phone 312-296-2323). It's a small gallery, which only just opened in time for the Chicago Comic Con last July. It's owned and operated by my friends Laurie Bradach and Kim Howard Johnson. Bradach, currently completing her PhD in Art History, is a longtime comics fan with years of mainstream art gallery and museum experience. You need only look so far as page 13 (*Tribe* preview) or page 46 (John Ostrander interview) to check out Howard's expertise. A Senior Contributing Writer to COMICS SCENE, Howard has covered the field for this magazine and others for more than a decade.

And what can you find, either in person or dealing by mail, at 23rd Century Artworks? Recently, they've had original art on display (and for sale) by Brian Bolland, Mike Grell, Tim Truman, Mark Wheatley, Todd McFarlane, Marc Silvestri, Howard Chaykin, Joe Quesada, Terry Gilliam, Don Heck, Mitch O'Connell, Bill Reinhold and Dan Jurgens, among many others.

23rd Century Artworks is a great place to view, by examining these original pages, examples of comics past and present. Look at those originals, hold them in your hands, buy them. And own a part of comic book history.

—David McDonnell/Editor

LETTERING

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...Having read the editorial in COMICS SCENE #30 on popular prices of comics now, I feel as though the joy and entertainment of comics has become a lost art.

From comic shops to conventions, all that's heard nowadays from young kids to older ones is how much it'll be worth months or years from now. They wonder if it's polybagged, foil-stamped, holograms, or something new with the moveable cover like on the *Robin 3* series. Come on now, fans and industry, get real—are we promoting the story or the cover? It would seem the cover, because the majority of the stories lack depth.

The *Uncanny X-Men* comic didn't become the most popular title using extravagant covers or marketing gimmicks, but by originality of characters and fulfilling stories that readers could hold on to. To keep the readers interested and coming back to the comic, the contents should hold the cover up, not vice versa.

It's a shame that DC had to kill off its most popular character (no doubt he'll be back) in order to bring in sales to the several *Superman* titles. Although it's the most talked-about thing in comics right now, I believe the event will pass over in a few months. Just recently, someone told me he doesn't care too much (or at all) for the stories, he just buys comics for the covers. I ended that conversation, saying, "What a shame."

I love comic books and have since I was seven. I've read every one whether the story is good, bad, silly or serious. I hope the business of comics doesn't end up like the baseball card industry: card collectors looking for investment, who couldn't care less about the game or player.

I'm very glad the comics industry has gained the recognition it wholly deserves, but let's not have readers, fans, or newcomers to comics fall for every stylized cover gimmick put out on the shelves today. At least read the stories and take heart in the efforts put forth.

Victor Bonhart
15435 Lincoln Avenue
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...Now that the *Batman* animated series has hit the air, just how good is it? Let me put it this way: I am now working on my *third* videotape of the episodes.

The voices are perfect; I'll be willing to forgive Kevin Conroy for *Rachel Gunn, R.N.* after his work here. One thing that I really like is that, as I learned from reading the closing credits, all minority characters are done by people of that ethnic group. Too many times I've heard non-ethnic performers doing poor imitations of Asian, Hispanic and black accents in cartoons that would be as laughable as they are offensive.

Standout episodes have been "Two-Face" (combining elements of crime drama with *Phantom of the Opera*), "Heart of Ice" (Mr. Freeze's origin), "Mad As a Hatter" (great Roddy McDowall performance), "Forgotten"/"The Underdwellers" (similar chain gang/slavery storylines). It also airs Sunday nights on Fox, allowing many more viewers to see this wonderful show. Besides, I think the evening time slot fits the show's mood even more than the afternoon slot.

Willie Holmes
8453 S. Saginaw Avenue
Chicago, IL 60617

...Why aren't there any better superhero movies than there are? As far as I'm concerned, there are only *five* decent, well-made and just plain good superhero movies: *Superman: The Movie*, *Superman II*, *Batman* (1989), *Batman Returns* and *The Flash* (TV movie pilot). These are not in any particular order. There are just too many superhero movies that should have been good, and turned out lousy: *Superman III*, *Superman IV: The Quest For Peace*, *Captain America*, *Supergirl* and, especially, *The Punisher*. *Captain America* and *The Punisher* were both films that could have been box office hits, but Albert Pyun turned *Captain America* into a wanna-be *Back to the Future/Forever Young*-type movie. And Mark Goldblatt turned *The Punisher* into just another Dolph Lundgren vehicle, with idiotic, bumbling gangsters who didn't come close to the comic book Punisher foes. Well, luckily, Marvel Comics left *Spider-Man* up to *Terminator* director James Cameron. Maybe that'll be the first *decent* Marvel Comics movie that we'll see. And to *real* movie directors like Ridley Scott, Tim Burton, Richard Donner, James Cameron, Steven Spielberg and George Lucas: How about a movie version of *The Green Lantern*???

James Ferace
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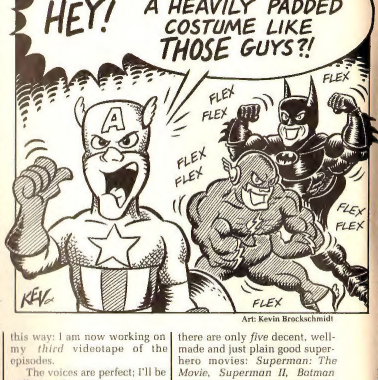

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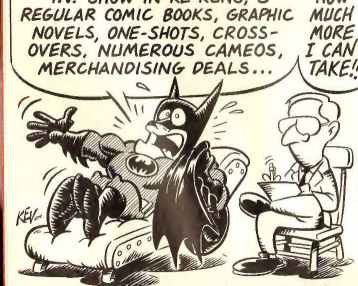
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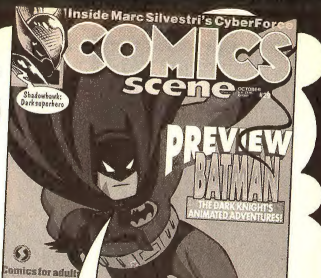
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IT IS NOT KNOWN AT THIS TIME WHETHER THIS MAN IS ACTIVELY INVOLVED IN CRIMINAL ACTIVITY.
WOLF IN THE FOLD
LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICIALS ARE AT A LOSS FOR AN EXPLANATION.
S. CHRISTOPHER

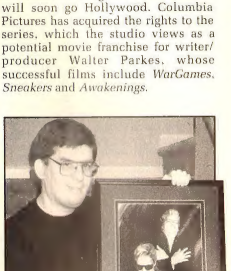
Their future's so bright, The Men In Black have to wear shades.

By SCOTT WESTCOTT

It's a story most would remember as an interesting tidbit, but to Cunningham—just beginning his career as a comic book writer—The Men In Black represented boundless opportunity.

"To me, it just jumped out in big 10-foot letters and said this is really something," says Cunningham, his voice carrying a hint of a Tennessee southern drawl. "I had never heard it before and it seemed to be ripe with possibility. It was just fascinating."

So fascinating that it wasn't long before he began to explore the possibilities. The result has been two comic book mini-series and now the likelihood that Cunningham's *Men In Black* will soon go Hollywood. Columbia Pictures has acquired the rights to the series, which the studio views as a potential movie franchise for writer/producer Walter Parkes, whose successful films include *WarGames*, *Sneakers* and *Awakenings*.



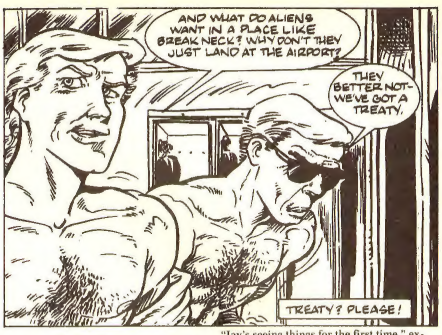
"I spend as much of my time thinking about it as I can," before writing, says Lowell Cunningham, with a *Men in Black* painting by Max Fellwalker.

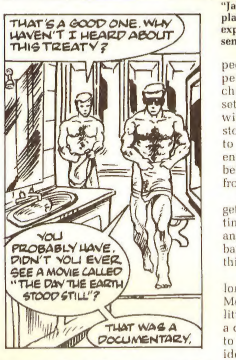
Photo & Scketch: Art Courtesy Lowell Cunningham

Lowell Cunningham was driving with a friend through Knoxville, Tennessee in the early 1980s when a jet-black Lincoln Continental with tinted windows cruised by. Cunningham's friend shook his head as the sleek car pulled ahead. "Man, that looks like a car The Men In Black would drive," he muttered.

Cunningham was intrigued. He had never heard of The Men In Black and pushed for details. The Men In Black, his friend continued, are familiar characters in urban mythology. Mysterious and shadowy, they're widely known but rarely seen. As agents of control, their mission is to keep the elements of chaos and disorder at bay. When people witness UFOs or have alien encounters. The Men In Black show up—and make certain the witnesses *forget* it ever happened. Government officials routinely deny their existence, but many people suspect The Men In Black act as liaisons between alien nations and world governments.

YOU REALLY EXPECT ME TO BELIEVE THAT WE'RE GOING OUT TO THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE AND FIND A BUNCH OF SPACESHIPS?
BELIEVE WHATEVER YOU WANT. FLYING SAUCERS ARE SERIOUS BUSINESS.
I KNOW. KEEPS THE ENGULFER GOING.


AND WHAT DO ALIENS WANT IN A PLACE LIKE BREAK NECK? WHY DON'T THEY JUST LAND AT THE AIRPORT?
THEY BETTER NOT- WE'VE GOT A TREATY.
TREATY? PLEASE!


THAT'S A GOOD ONE. WHY HAVEN'T I HEARD ABOUT THIS TREATY?
YOU PROBABLY HAVE. DIDN'T YOU EVER SEE A MOVIE CALLED "THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL"?
THAT WAS A DOCUMENTARY.

"Jay's seeing things for the first time," explains Cunningham. "He can have things explained to him and still have it make sense within a story."

All Men in Black Art By & Copyright ©1990, 1991 Sandy Carruthers

Tracy Barone, vice president of production at Columbia-based Aerial Pix, was responsible for bringing *The Men In Black* to Hollywood.

"I've been looking at a lot of graphic novels, and obviously you go after comic books for their strong visual concepts, but *The Men In Black* stands out because it's not only a great concept but the writing is fresh, witty and smart," Barone says, "and you don't always find that in comics."

Far away from the glitz of Hollywood in Knoxville, word that Columbia wanted to convert his comic book into a movie stunned Lowell Cunningham. The thought of *The Men In Black* coming to life on the screen or as a TV mini-series had long been brewing in the back of his mind, but he couldn't believe it might actually happen. In the swirling excitement, the 33-year-old, who works as a computer tutor at a local community college, dropped five pounds in a few days.

"I've got it to lose," he laughs. "I'm hoping something exciting happens again and I lose 10 more pounds."

The Men In Black centers on two characters decked out in well-tailored dark suits and Ray-Ban sunglasses. Jay is the young, idealistic rookie, and Kay, the grizzled, cynical veteran. Teamed together, Cunningham thinks the agents' escapades and encounters with extraordinary forces will hold broad appeal for moviegoers.

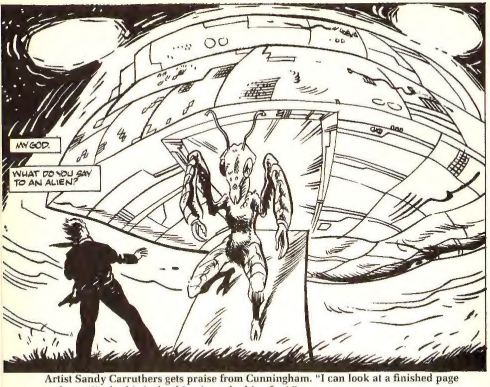
"It's something that can be translated to a different media and be recognizable to the audience," he says. "The spy fans are going to think these people are spies; the science fiction people are going to see that the characters are in a science fiction setting; and the action-adventure fans will say this is an action-adventure story. The concept is different enough to be interesting, but it's similar enough to some things that have come before that it won't prevent people from getting into it."

Columbia is currently working to get the project underway. In the meantime, Cunningham is hard at work on another *Men In Black* saga. Knoxville-based Castle Graphics will issue this third mini-series later this year.

Basing his stories loosely on the long-standing urban myths about The Men In Black, Cunningham did very little research in developing the idea as a comic book. For one, he didn't want to be influenced by other writers' ideas. In addition, he decided that to sustain an ongoing series, he would have to go outside the confines of the myth that focuses primarily on UFOs. Cunningham's characters encounter all kinds of supernatural beings. So far—in addition to UFOs—*The Men In Black* have come up against a demon called up during a role-playing game, a strange raven-like creature and a werewolf, among others.

Cunningham's early versions of *The Men In Black*, written in the mid-1980s, were short, six-page stories—long on action and short on character development. "Basically, they would show up, go up against whatever they were going up against, then leave and that was it," he says.

Several comics publishers rejected or ignored the idea. Then in 1989, an editor at Malibu Graphics reviewed a



Artist Sandy Carruthers gets praise from Cunningham. "I can look at a finished page and say, 'Yeah, this is the thing I was looking for.' "

short version of the comic and decided on more ambitious plans for *The Men In Black*. Malibu asked Cunningham to do a proposal for an action-adventure mini-series, and *The Men In Black* comic books were born.

"It was a pleasant surprise," Cunningham notes. "They wanted individual stories, so anyone could pick up any issue and not have to have seen another one. That went back to me looking at it as a kind of a television show. I wrote it as if I was writing an episode for a TV series."

Cunningham has tried to give *The Men In Black* more substance than some other action-adventure characters. Instead of the "beat 'em up and go home theme," the writer typically develops his characters while leading up to a climactic struggle with the extraordinary that doesn't necessarily get resolved through violence.

"An emotional aspect to a story always gives it a little more impact," Cunningham explains. "If you're just watching two characters slug it out, it's like a wrestling match and whoever wins, wins. If you don't feel anything for either one of them, then where is the thrill of victory when the good guy wins or the agony of defeat when the bad guy beats the good guy?"

While Jay and Kay often deal with the fantastic and extraterrestrial, Cunningham makes the stories as realistic as possible. A realistic plot, he says, draws readers into a story, so that they care about what happens.

"One of my pet peeves is to show characters going through all kinds of physical turmoil—being beat up, tossed about and thrown off a building and then getting up, dusting themselves off and everything's all right. That's just *not* the way it is in the real world: You could fall three or four feet and be paralyzed.

"There's some room for literary license so your character isn't beaten to a pulp every time he goes out. At the same time, it turns me off when I see things blatantly impossible. To me, a story has *more* impact if I can imagine it's something feasible."

Tension between Jay and Kay is an underlying but ever-present theme in *The Men In Black*. The idealistic Jay looks for different and non-violent solutions to problems; Kay's answer is to destroy them. The two characters maintain "a love-hate relationship that's heavy on the hate and light on the love," Cunningham says. Still, they share a begrudging respect for one another because each sees in the other talents he himself might not possess.

The pairing was created for very specific reasons. By having a rookie, aspects of *The Men In Black* could be explained without slowing the story's pace. The reader learns things along with Jay.

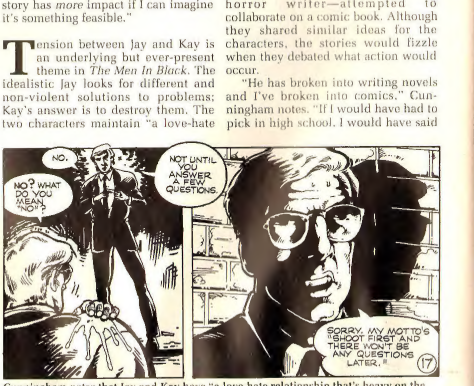
"He's a character that's new, so he can have things explained to him and still have it make sense within a story so I don't have to stop and explain things to a reader," says Cunningham. "Jay's seeing things for the first time. If I had a character going through amazing things and then just yawning at the end because he did it yesterday, I think that would make it less interesting for the readers."

Cunningham should know what readers are looking for—as long as he can remember, comics have been a part of his life. He says he practically learned to read on the Looney Tunes comics like *Bugs Bunny* and *Daffy Duck*. From there, he dove into the world of superheroes, growing up reading *Superman* and *Batman*.

"My mother used to joke I had X-ray vision and I could tell which stores had comics in them and which ones didn't," he says. "Comics are where the majority of my money went."

Cunningham's first crack at comic book writing came while still in high school. He and a friend, Ronald Kelly—now an up-and-coming horror writer—attempted to collaborate on a comic book. Although they shared similar ideas for the characters, the stories would fizzle when they debated what action would occur.

"He has broken into writing novels and I've broken into comics," Cunningham notes. "If I would have had to pick in high school, I would have said


NO.
NO? WHAT DO YOU MEAN "NO"?
NOT UNTIL YOU ANSWER A FEW QUESTIONS.
SORRY. MY MOTTO'S "SHOOT FIRST AND THERE WON'T BE ANY QUESTIONS LATER."
17

Cunningham notes that Jay and Kay have "a love-hate relationship that's heavy on the hate and light on the love."

KIDS? KIDS DID THIS?
NOT LIKELY. PROBABLY SOME SORT OF INTER-DIMENSIONAL DISCONTINUITY.
OK, SIR MICHAEL, YOU'VE LOST YOUR PALADIN.
I'M SENDING MY WIZARD TO RESURRECT HIM.
A TIBETAN DODECAHEDRON. HOW THE HELL DID THEY GET HOLD OF THIS?
THAT'S A MIRACLE LEVEL SPELL.
All Men in Black Characters: Copyright 1990, 1997 Lowell Cunningham

The Men in Black take on all those incidents that can't be explained, or *shouldn't* be. Like a demon summoned by a role-playing game.

the exact opposite would happen."

Indeed, when Cunningham entered the University of Tennessee, he took some writing classes hoping to learn the craft of writing fiction. He soon realized, however, that his strengths were in plotting and characterization, but his stories often got bogged down in details. What held him back in fiction writing worked to his advantage in comics, where extensive details describing a scene help an artist grasp the storyline.

"I figured I would stand a better chance in comics, so I pursued that and sure enough, I got my break," Cunningham says. "I haven't gotten to the point of making a living at it, but I've gotten a few things published."

In all, Cunningham has scripted about 30 comics. In addition to *The Men In Black*, his work, mostly published by Malibu Graphic imprints includes *Pentacle*, *Alien Nation: The Skin Trade*, *Subspecies*, *Eliminator*, *Alien Nation: Public Enemy* and *The Forbidden Zone* (based on *Planet of the Apes*).

Cunningham considers *Eliminator*, whose main character uses virtual reality technology to solve crimes in a future society, as his finest work. In *Eliminator*, the writer thinks he succeeded in creating interesting characters along with compelling storylines. He also went beyond simple entertainment.

"I *do* think I was able to touch on some issues to get people thinking," he says. "If I have an opinion on something, I think it shows through."

As with most writers, Cunningham gets his ideas from a slew of sources. Tidbits read in a science magazine sometimes plant the seed for a storyline. Ideas often come to him while he takes his frequent walks. One issue of *The Men In Black* was even based on a nightmare he had.

Those ideas are converted to black-and-white in Cunningham's "lair," where space-adventure figurines line the bookshelves and movie posters and original *Alien Nation* comic artwork plaster the walls. Before sitting down to work, Cunningham has a clear idea of his story's plot. He doesn't illustrate—saving the images become blurred somewhere between his brain and his hand—but conjures up mental pictures of the characters and action.

"I know where I'm starting from and where I'm ending up. I usually have a general idea of what has to go in between," he says. "I'm the sort of person who, unless I had a general idea of *what* I was going to do, I couldn't begin to sit down and do it.

"I'm not just hopping in a car and going for a nice little ride. I'm hopping in the car and I'm headed somewhere. I might take a different route than I started with to get there, but I end up where I intended to be."

Occasionally, that ride is swift and trouble-free. Cunningham started the second issue of *Eliminator* on a Monday and finished by Friday. Usually, though, the road is rockier and the driving tedious. The writing is nearly always a bigger challenge than first imagined.

"This sort of thing is always easier to theorize about," he says. "It's actually sitting down and doing it that's the hard part. I tell everybody that before I got this contract to write *The Men In Black*, I knew I *could* do it. When I got the contract, I realized I *had* to do it. That's two different things. It was quite an education."

Although he admits he should write daily, Cunningham usually doesn't sit before his computer until a deadline looms large.

"Part of that is laziness and part is the way I work," he says. "Abraham Lincoln has a quote. He said, 'If I had eight hours to cut down a tree, I would spend the first six hours sharpening my axe.' That's kind of the way I work. I spend as much of my time thinking about it as I can."

(continued on page 56)

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TEAM WORK

By KIM HOWARD JOHNSON

After drawing *Alien Legion* and *X-Factor* for several years, Larry Stroman is creating his own comics team—but he says his new series for Image is a little different from his previous books.

"*Tribe* is the most fun I've had in comics," he says. "I'm having a great time!"

Collaborating with his friend, scripter Todd Johnson (no relation to this article's writer), Stroman says *Tribe* will be the biggest, wildest team in comics, filled with things he has *always* wanted to draw.

"*Tribe* has everything we've wanted to see in comics," agrees Johnson. "Both of us have been comics readers for a long time, and we decided to put in all the things we ever wanted."

Stroman met Johnson about two years ago, when he was attending comics conventions organized by Johnson. When Stroman suggested they collaborate on a book for Image, Johnson agreed immediately.

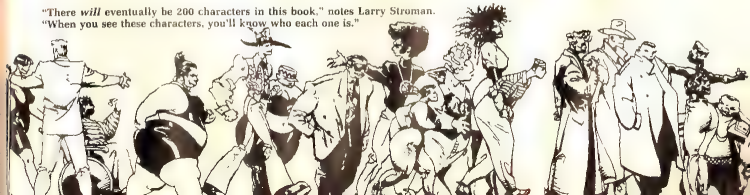
"I had gotten an offer from the Image guys before they announced they were forming Image," says Stroman. "They asked me if I would be interested in doing a book. I hesitated and told them I would like to, but I didn't know *when* I would be able to do it. The only idea I had was for a team book. Over a period of months, Todd and I had talked about the type of things we wanted to do."

"Whenever Larry and I had been sitting around during the last couple of years," Johnson notes, "we would laugh about different characters that would be nice to have in a comic. We would say, 'Oh, if we did a speed guy, it would be like this,' or 'How about a big character that would do these kinds of things?' What started out as just conversation about things we thought were funny or interesting, ended up in *Tribe*! We had a lot of that to draw from—we already had some things in common that we both liked. When we started putting together outlines for a team book, we just put all of those characters in it!"

Creating Tribe is the most fun Larry Stroman & Todd Johnson have had in comics.

Tribe combines elements of different genres, but, according to the artist, "basically, it's a superhero book. Within it are various science fiction concepts, family stuff, and all kinds of things."

"There *will* eventually be 200 characters in this book," notes Larry Stroman. "When you see these characters, you'll know who each one is."

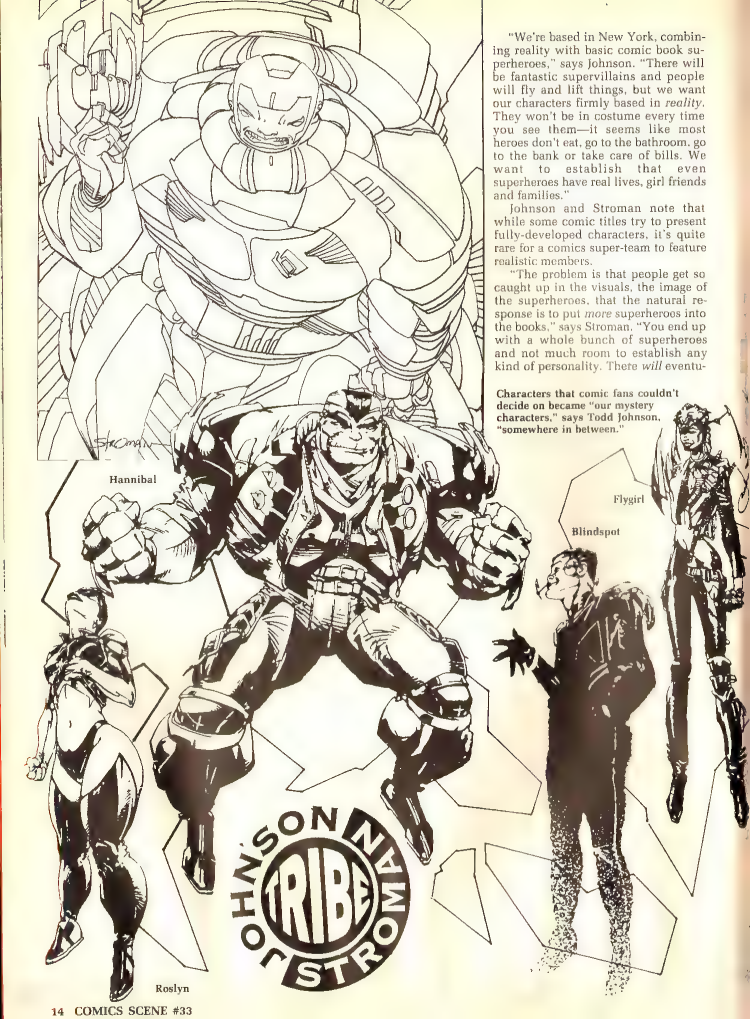


"We're based in New York, combining reality with basic comic book superheroes," says Johnson. "There will be fantastic supervillains and people will fly and lift things, but we want our characters firmly based in *reality*. They won't be in costume every time you see them—it seems like most heroes don't eat, go to the bathroom, go to the bank or take care of bills. We want to establish that even superheroes have real lives, girl friends and families."

Johnson and Stroman note that while some comic titles try to present fully-developed characters, it's quite rare for a comics super-team to feature realistic members.

"The problem is that people get so caught up in the visuals, the image of the superheroes, that the natural response is to put *more* superheroes into the books," says Stroman. "You end up with a whole bunch of superheroes and not much room to establish any kind of personality. There *will* eventu-

Characters that comic fans couldn't decide on became "our mystery characters," says Todd Johnson, "somewhere in between."



Short Order, sparring with Roslyn, "can break apart into 50 little guys," explains Johnson. But half have cellular cancer, so they get left out of the reforming.

ally be 200 characters in this book, but it'll be done over a slow period of time. When you actually see these characters, you'll know who each one is."

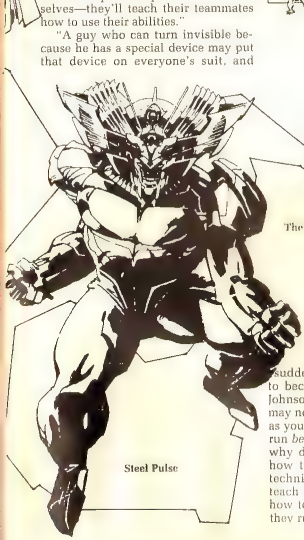
"It's not going to be a situation where a new team member will just appear out of nowhere in full costume," says Johnson. "We're trying to establish each character individually so that readers know something personal about each one of them."

"*Tribe* starts off with seven or eight characters, and each issue or so introduces another one," says Stroman. "The character may not even have anything to do with the story, he may just appear in a scene as a regular-looking guy. Readers won't realize immediately that they're going to be regulars.

"We're also going to see what happens when a character who has been used to a certain power suddenly acquires a different type of power. We're going to deal with characters who have multiple abilities. For instance, characters who are really good at something won't keep their powers to themselves—they'll teach their teammates how to use their abilities."

"A guy who can turn invisible because he has a special device may put that device on everyone's suit, and

All Art: By & Courtesy Larry Stroman



suddenly, he's not special—so, he has to become somebody else," explains Johnson. "If you have superspeed, you may not be able to make me run as fast as you, but you could teach me how to run *better*. If a guy is King of the Seas, why doesn't he teach his teammates how to swim better? It may just be techniques—the running guy could teach some of the other teammates how to breathe or take a stride when they run, just like a track coach would do, so that the whole team is constantly helping each other to learn more about how his or her powers work, and become better."

Although Tribe membership will constantly rotate, the series starts out with a few core members. "The team leader is Blind Spot, and he's an entrepreneur and scientist named Murdock Ellison, who has created a stealth suit—you can't hear him or see him, because he evades all the senses. He gathers all the Tribe together," says Johnson.

"Steel Pulse has a company called Allotech which is working on experimental metals and different ways of bonding them. As Matthew Desmond, he invents a metal called Stromium, obviously named after Larry! Stromium is a very malleable yet very strong metal that has energy-absorbing powers. Europan, the company that challenges the Tribe, wants that technology, and ends up raiding the corporation at night to steal his research. Desmond happens to be in there and gets caught in an explosion, where he's bathed in the metals. He becomes Steel Pulse, a guy made up of living metal. His cellular structure starts breaking down and he can't hold his human form anymore without real pain, so they build him an exoskeleton

All Tribe Characters & Art: Trademark & Copyright 1993 Larry Stroman & Todd Johnson

"We're trying to establish each character individually," explains Johnson, as Krieger shows some of that individuality.

so he can let the metal pour into all the ducts of the suit. If he takes his helmet off, his head will sit there for a minute before it globs away like mercury.

"Short Order is Sebastian Todd, owner of a restaurant called Gourmet Pups, who has cellular cancer. His cell structure is breaking down, and if he makes any kind of motion or knocks against anything, he can break apart into 50 little guys. When he splits up, half of the little guys are full of these cancerous cells, and half are full of the healthy cells. So, he re-forms with the good ones, and the other ones eventually die. Not only is it a painful process, it's an emotional thing for him to make these sacrifices all the time, because these are little pieces of him. If he doesn't do it, though, his whole body will become contaminated and he'll die."

"It's almost like the feeling someone could get when they know they'll have to get a part of their body removed," adds Stroman.

"Roslyn is the mystery woman of the team," Johnson continues. "We haven't really defined what her powers are, but she'll pretty much end up being the most powerful member. She'll have to come to grips with what she is, and what her powers are. Right now, she's just real strong, real tough.

"Hannibal is the big guy of the team. He's very strong. Hannibal is able to manipulate many different energy levels. We don't want to say exactly what he is; the readers will have to put the pieces together to find out."

"Then, there's Elias Banneker, a mechanical genius," says Stroman. "He's the reason this team got together in the first place. He really has no powers, but he'll eventually be the book's focal point."

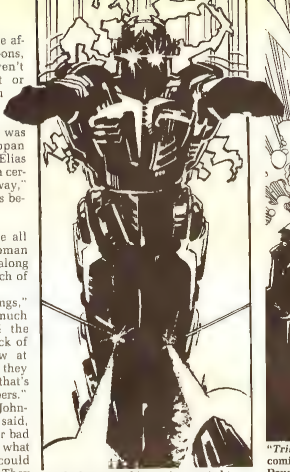
"Shift is Franklin Sadler, a former middleweight champion boxer," Johnson explains. "He was forced to retire because he had some muscle damage. He underwent experiments at a special clinic, and as a result, his reflexes were damaged and he wasn't able to enter boxing again. As an after-effect of these treatments, he ended up getting superspeed and he bets on himself. He joins Tribe because he's a friend of Blind Spot—he does it strictly for the adventure. Being a speed character, he's always in a rush; he always has something to do, and some place to go."

Fly Girl and The Front are other members of the Tribe family, who join together to battle a megacorporation working toward world domination. "They all join together because a couple of the members started dealing with Europan," says Johnson. "Europan is a conglomeration of European and Japanese corporations that have gotten together to corner the

"Roslyn is our mystery woman," Johnson says. "She'll pretty much end up being the most powerful member."

world's technology market: they're after *any* type of breakthrough weapons, research or power. If you haven't patented a particular product or brought it to market and it's still in the research stage, they'll try to buy it or just take it."

Stroman notes that the Tribe was essentially formed when Europan turned on one of its members. "Elias Bannecker didn't want to give up a certain patent, but they stole it anyway," he says. "As a result, Europan has become even more powerful."



"Tribe has everything we've wanted to see in comics," says Johnson. That includes Krieger in an exo-skeleton.

"Tribe is the most fun I've had in comics!" exclaims Stroman. And if Lord Deus is an example, so will readers.

When the characters were all being designed, Stroman relied on his instincts, along with input from fans, to make each of them distinctive.

"I did up a bunch of drawings," says Stroman. "We had pretty much planned out who we wanted the characters to be, but I had a stack of drawings that we would show at conventions and ask people what they thought of different characters—that's how we picked the original members."

"We had a random poll," says Johnson. "We held up pictures and said, 'What do you think? Good guy or bad guy?' We were also curious to see what would happen if comics fans could make decisions at the beginning. They usually liked big, flashy, tough-looking characters as bad guys, in bigger, clunkier costumes. The slicker, smaller ones they wanted as good guys.

"There were a couple of characters that they couldn't decide on," he notes. "Those are our mystery characters, somewhere in between."

In a comics market glutted with too many super-teams to name, the creators of *Tribe* say that their group doesn't have traditional motivations.

"*Tribe* is not a conglomeration of heroes that decided to be a team so they could go out and fight crime and supervillains," says Johnson. "*Tribe* is basically a group of individuals with their own agenda, in the group for their own reasons. Traditional teams have the same beliefs and are out to do the same things. Tribe isn't like that. Roslyn is in it because she wants to try to understand what her powers are. Swift is in it because he's adventurous, in it for the excitement, and Blind Spot has a vendetta. Hannibal and Elias want revenge."

"In one issue, they might be fighting one particular bad guy, but in the next, when they have to face some other situation, some of the characters might simply say, 'I'm not interested. Get somebody else to help you out.' And they'll just recruit somebody else," says Stroman.

"The actual team will be changing," Johnson says. "We want to have realistic situations, where if they call someone to do something and that person has a hot date that night, and has just fought 10 battles with the Tribe before, he might say, 'Hey, I've been planning this date for months—go find somebody else to fight the bad guy!' "

"You never really know whether they're going to be together or not," adds Stroman. "There could be issues with only two characters. We're not going to have any clubhouse or signal rings. Instead of a headquarters, they may just meet at each other's houses!"

Although *Tribe* is part of the Image Universe in that it takes place in the same world as the other Image titles, explains Stroman, they'll rarely have anything to do with each other. "Most of the Image books take place in different locations. Ours just happens to be set in Brooklyn. At some point, our characters will probably meet up with some of the others, but that's not really the intention—it's just something that will happen."

One element of *Tribe* that does cross into other Image books is the threat of Europan. "Because they have their hand in everything, Europan will eventually grow into a mega-corporation that affects much of the Image Universe. They'll be providing villains with certain weaponry, and getting involved with other companies in other people's books," says Johnson. "One of the companies that they were going to try to access was Cyberdata, and they pretty much backed off because of Cyberforce. There are always little mentions that tie in with other titles. For example, in the last issue of *Savage Dragon*, one of the villains had bought something from Cyberdata, and he was pissed off because it didn't work."

Although *Tribe* technically begins as a four-issue limited series, it is actually continuing after that as an ongoing title, resuming the numbering with issue #5. "The first four issues are actually more like a story arc than a mini-series," says Johnson. "The first story is the formation of the core of *Tribe* members. The origins of several characters are right there."

"The bad guy is there at the book's beginning, too. His name is Victor von Grock; he's the president of Europan's U.S. operations, and he has powers of his own. You're getting more than the introductions of the characters in the first issue," says Larry Stroman. "You're getting part of the story that continues into the second issue."

From there, Johnson says *Tribe* will continue to grow. While constantly devising new characters, they remain very excited about the future of *Tribe*.

"A few more characters are going to be introduced around issue #5," says Todd Johnson. "Once we finish the first story arc, you'll see some of the other *200 characters* that we've already created!"

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Part Two

By PAT JANKIEWICZ

After 42 years in comics, John Romita still marvels at Spider-Man's marriage & Gwen Stacy's death.

John Romita, the veteran artist who has spent more than 42 years in comics, has drawn almost every character in the Marvel Universe. "I like 'em all," he professes, "but some are harder and more time-consuming than others! If I had to do a whole story with the Thing [of the Fantastic Four], I would go *crazy*! All those rocks!

"Spider-Man is actually a chore to do when you have a lot of pages—I'm doing a 63-page inking job on Ron Frenz for a one-shot *Spider-Man* special, and it's a chore! All those pages of that costume wears you out. Unfortunately," he chuckles, "Ron and I aren't done with it yet!"

Ironically, Romita's favorite character is "Daredevil. I like Spider-Man because I'm closely associated with him, but I was most at home with Daredevil," he declares. "It was more my natural style. It hadn't been a big book, so I was able to be more of myself on it. On *Spider-Man*, I did six years-plus, and in my first four years on it, I always felt like a ghost artist!

"It's a strange thing I can't explain," he says of his spectral status. "I took over on issue 39. Steve Ditko had over three years of precedence, and I felt the urge and obligation to ghost it and copy the Ditko style. I was very reluctant to be myself on it, because I thought the readers weren't gonna be happy with this change in style, as opposed to young artists today. First thing they want to do is change the look, the character, the costume and kill off all the old characters! I didn't feel that obligation."

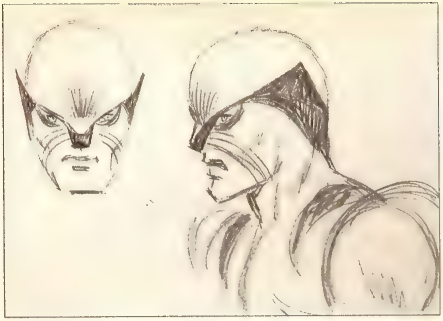
Romita's first years with the web-slinger were tough. "Other artists always got more mail," he recalls. "During my first couple of years on *Spider-Man*, people would tell me right to my face, 'We like your stuff, but when is Ditko coming back?' They would ask, 'Why don't you do him as mysteriously as Ditko did him? Why don't you use as much shadow as Ditko?' I accepted it, because I figure the *readers* are the ones who call the shots.

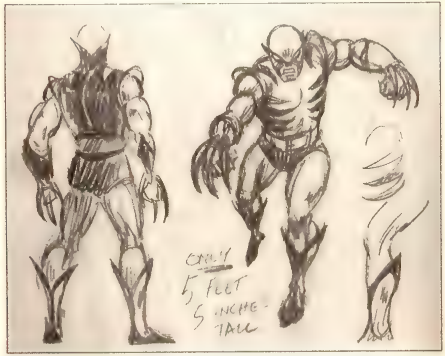
"I asked Stan, 'Any chance of Ditko coming back?' He said, 'No, Ditko doesn't want to do *Spider-Man* anymore.' I would say, 'Everybody's waiting for him to come back—I feel like a usurper!' That's why I always felt like a temporary artist."

The artist's first task on the book (issues #39-40) was to unmask the Green Goblin. "Everyone says those were a landmark two issues, but I didn't realize it at the time," he laughs. "I thought it was just another day in the Peter Parker saga. I didn't know it was such a turning point; I was just there at the right time."

Romita also designed Mary Jane Watson, Spider-Man's future wife. "My original concept of Mary Jane was that she was gonna be a flighty, dizzy girl with no sense, and I wanted to show her slowly but surely becoming mature and responsible," he notes. "Stan agreed to that in principle, but we never adhered to it! He liked her as a flighty character and never wanted to show her sobering up.

"I was off the book by the time that came. We tried to project character development, not so much age-changing as personality changes. When you meet new people, they change you. Mary Jane was dizzy, and then she met Peter Parker, who's very somber and serious all the time. She cheers him up and he makes her responsible. We





The original Romita Wolverine had the yellow and black costume. "It changed as they went along."

always discussed, 'Is she going to be his future wife? Is he going to get married?' "

The illustrator was also invited to Spider-Man's wedding, even though he objected to the idea and didn't hold his peace. "I didn't think he should have gotten married, and once again, I'm proven wrong," he laughs. "When Li'l Abner got married, his strip went downhill. All the years they did the Sadie Hawkins Day, with Li'l Abner as the most eligible bachelor in Dogpatch, were great. The strip started to die when he got married. I pointed that out to them; I said, 'Remember what happened to Li'l Abner?' and they laughed!

"I would love to make Mary Jane the star of her own comic," Romita declares, "just her as a working girl trying to make it in today's world. It's not commercial, just a pet thought of mine. My mission in life now, as I draw toward my final curtain, is to try to make a female character, whether it be a superheroine or a regular woman, a *commercial* success. Rogue, Phoenix and Elektra are successes—but 'trick successes'; they're *not* carrying the masthead."

Spider-Man tales of the 1960s covered a variety of subjects, from Vietnam to the drug problem. "Stan always wanted to reflect the social climate," Romita explains. "We did issues about riots on college campuses and we would have all sorts of undercurrents of unrest, but we always tried to entertain first and slip in a message second.

"When we plotted stories, we were always aware of the danger [of being preachy]. If you have the message in front of the story, you're dead. DC tried many socially conscious things, but they always put the message in front of the entertainment, while we always made it our business to slip the message in subliminally.

"I was very happy with some of the stories. We did a three-part story on Flash Thompson—a major character—and his experiences in Vietnam. There were two characters in the story, an Asian old-timer and a [Vietnamese] girl [Flash loves]. Those two came out of me with love. I enjoyed those characters and really wanted to prove a point. I wanted to show something about the Vietnam experience—not just the negativity, but the other side, a *positive* side, and show that Flash had been through a traumatic experience."

The Amazing Spider-Man also introduced one of the first black comics regulars. "We had Robbie Robertson [later called Joe "Robbie" Robertson], the *Daily Bugle* City Editor," Romita recalls. "We got a great response on the character. Robertson was contrived, but in a beneficent way. We weren't trying to cash in—we felt the actual need to show [minorities]. Stan told me he wanted a black City Editor, but nobody knew he was supposed to be an ex-fighter—that's why I gave him a broken nose.

"Originally, when I first gave Stan the character sketch, I drew him with a cauliflower ear," he continues. "Stan told me not to use it because young readers wouldn't understand that kind of stuff; they would think it's a badly drawn ear, and they would write in asking, 'Why doesn't John Romita know how to draw *ears*?'

"Stan never pursued Robbie's origin, as a young black fighting his way out of the ghetto who became a Golden Gloves prizefighter and then a City Editor. Whenever I created a character, I always gave him a background, something to hang it on."

The artist's favorite villain was the titanic crime boss named the Kingpin. "I created the look of the Kingpin," he states. "Stan would write the character's name, and I would find an index card with the word 'Kingpin' on it. 'Next month's villain will be the Kingpin.' It would be up to me, when I did the panel where he first shows up, to come up with an interesting character. It was my idea to make him bald, 400 pounds and dressed like a tycoon. I wanted him to be as *unlike* a normal thug as possible, so that it would be a nice combination when thugs were used against him. It worked out very well. I took great relish in doing all the Kingpin stories."

The most shocking Spider-Man story came when Gwen Stacy, Peter's girl friend, was killed by the Green Goblin. Romita remembers helping plot the deed. "We had a meeting, Stan and me, Gerry Conway and Roy Thomas," he recalls. "We were brainstorming an attempt to jazz up the book, because it would stagnate every so often. Stan said, 'I'm having trouble with Aunt May. I'm tired of doing the Aunt schtick.'

"Gerry was writing it at the time, and Stan wanted us to come up with a twist. One suggestion Stan denies, but *I* remember well, was that Aunt May would die. I pointed out that Aunt May was too important to his secret identity, and it would make him another Clark Kent if he didn't have an aunt to constantly irritate and tell him, 'Don't catch cold,' or 'Be careful walking down the steps.' I thought we would miss too much if we lost her.

"I know she's an old hag," Romita says of Spidey's beloved aunt. "I tried cutting 60 years off her age when I drew her, but I said, 'I don't think we should kill Aunt May; she's too important to the premise. We probably have one girl friend too many.' After having them [Gwen and Mary Jane] clash a few times, it got old. Stan was pushing for Gwen to be *the* girl friend and Mary Jane to be the comic relief. I said, 'If you kill Mary Jane, I don't think it would be a big loss,' even though she was my character."

Although Lee wanted Gwen to become Peter's wife, she was overshadowed by the red-maned Mary Jane. "Stan always accused me of making Mary Jane look better than Gwen," Romita chuckles. "It's interesting, I

THAT WON'T HELP YOU, SMART GUY! YOU CAN'T HOLD ONTO A HEAVY HASSOCK FOREVER!
WELL THEN, WOULD YOU BELIEVE A FEW SECONDS?
DAREDEVIL, LOOK OUT! THE OTHERS ARE STARTING TO CLOSE IN AGAIN!
THWOK!
THUMP!
THOMM!
YEEOOOF!
PLOOMP!
HE WAS RIGHT! HOW COULD I HOLD ON TO THAT THING FOREVER...
AND, I DIDN'T INTEND TO!
AND NOW, I'LL CONCENTRATE ON OUR OTHER DOWNER-BOOM RASCALS!
IN CASE I FORGET TO TELL YOU LATER... WANT THANK YOU FELLAS NOW...
USUALLY A GENT LIKE ME HAS TO PAY TO HIRE A BUNCH OF SPUNKY SMASHING PARTNERS!
BUT IT'S REALNICE OF YOU EAGER BEAVERS TO VOLUNTEER YOUR SERVICES FOR FREE!
SPLAK!
PAY ATTENTION WHEN I'M TALKING TO YOU
OKAY... LAGS IS OVER FOR NOW...
YOU'VE RED-FINGER PEACHY ABOUT THE WHOLE THING!
WOK!
FTOP!
DAREDEVIL... DOES IT MATTER WHICH ONE OF THEM IS GETTING AWAY?
THAT'S ALL RIGHT COUNSELOR, WE MUSTN'T BE GREEDY!
WE DON'T WANT TO PUT ALL THE OTHMR WORK... LET'S LEAVE SOME FOR THEM!
GOTTA GET AWAY!
GOTTA REACH THE MARAUDER!
WAIT'A MINUTE! WHAT ABOUT DEVIL?

Art: John Romita/Frank Giacoia

Photo: Lisa Ortiz

Though closely associated with Spider-Man, Romita is "most at home with Daredevil."

used to deny it, but I *couldn't* make Gwen look as glamorous as Mary Jane for some reason. I always thought of Gwen as a more sensible girl. I suggested Gwen [be killed off], and Stan at first said no, but then realized it would be the most shocking. Gerry Conway got threatening mail for months after that death. He shouldn't have to take the rap alone; it was a *committee* decision."

Comics characters, Romita believes, should die for the title's greater good. "We would do it to shake readers up. If readers think nobody's going to get hurt, they start to not care. But if they're afraid somebody will get hurt, they start to worry. You get readers really hooked if somebody important dies. That's a trick I learned from Milton Caniff. When I was 12, I loved his comic strip *Terry & the Pirates* so much that I would absorb it through my pores! It was the greatest art/writing combination ever: *no one* has done better.

"He would kill off characters regularly, and it would almost bring me to tears. If a character died, I would go around in a funk for weeks! I felt like I lost a friend," the artist explains. "I remember he killed a blonde girl named Raven Sherman. She was very important to Terry and Pat Ryan, and Caniff killed her off! Boy, what a terrible blow! People on the street were saying, 'Did you hear Raven Sherman died?' That stayed in my mind.

"Twenty years later, in *Spider-Man*,

Always the perfectionist, John Romita looks back on an eventful career.

[we're killing a blonde girl] and I used that same emotion. You only kill the most important characters; otherwise, it's a waste of time. You kill a major character like Gwen Stacy and look at the reaction. Years later, people *still* talk about that story. I feel like I have blood on my hands," he admits, "but I'm very pleased."

Lee and Romita also launched an internationally popular *Spider-Man* newspaper strip, now approaching its 15th year. While Lee still writes the feature, Romita left "because of sheer exhaustion. I really didn't want to give it up, but I had to because I was tired. It was hard to work seven days a week, and also try to keep my job at Marvel, because the chances of that strip surviving as long as it has were very remote. To get the strip bought in the first place was a miracle, against the odds, but to have it sustain for such a long period of time?

"I really regretted leaving it," he states. "Many times I dream of going back to it. I loved getting stuff from all over the world. Having people from Europe, Asia and South America write

"I didn't think Spider-Man should have gotten married," the artist notes, "and once again, I'm proven wrong."

letters was very gratifying. I've gotten mail from people who said it was a guiding light during their teens, and made a difference on how they looked at the world. Letters would say, 'I want to thank you for all those years of enjoyment.' I've had people tell me it changed their lives, that they *weren't* interested in reading until they saw *Spider-Man*."

One of Romita's greatest accomplishments was *Spidey Super Stories*, a comic that helped kids learn to read. "I worked very closely with the Children's Television Workshop, and we developed that book scientifically," he explains. "I believe it was the greatest educational tool comics ever put out. It was designed by scientists with eye study charts to show where young readers' eyes go on a panel. For years, educators said, 'Comic books rot the brain,' then they come back and say, 'This was a great success. We think it triggered young people into reading real books.' Doing that was one of my proudest moments."

In designing the Kingpin, "Stan [Lee] would write the name and it would be up to me to come up with an interesting character."

Romita has a theory on why Spider-Man's live-action TV show and film attempts have thus far failed. "I just think they have been badly handled,"

he states. "The wrong team of people, the wrong approach. It's unfortunate. Roger Corman was gonna do it [a Spider-Man film], with Bob Hoskins as Dr. Octopus. Those were both good possibilities, and I'm sorry they *never* came to pass. There have been many aborted attempts at Spider-Man that I was really rooting for, and I can't stand that they never came to pass."

Happily, Spidey's fate now rests in the hands of writer/director James (*Terminator 2*) Cameron. "I would crawl on my belly to help on that film," Romita declares. "James Cameron can call me anytime; I'll do *anything* to help. He intends to keep it faithful to the character and his origin. He said he's going to consult with Stan on it, so it sounds great. I'm pleased as punch that he's doing *Spider-Man*—he's the perfect guy to do it. If anyone can do it, he can. Can you imagine what he could do with a villain like Sandman?"

All Art: John Romita

Countless other Marvel characters have been designed by Romita over the years, but "the one that has probably made the most impact is the Punisher," he notes. "They came to me and said, 'We want a character who's a vigilante type.' So, I came up with the guy wearing the skull, as opposed to a skull and crossbones, which had been used a lot.

"When I did the first sketch of him in 1974—which I still have hanging on my office wall—I *didn't* put a mask on him. I fully expected them to say, 'This is great, but put a mask on him.' I was surprised when they *didn't* and decided not to say anything. Why did they let me go with an unmasked character? No secret identity. They liked masked characters 'cause it gave them many options for the future—an exotic origin, like Wolverine."

Speaking of the X-Man, Romita remembers, "When I did the first Wolverine costume, it was yellow and black, and it changed as they went along. I think they went back to it. Todd McFarlane brought it back [during his *Spider-Man* run]. I wonder if Todd knew that was my design?" he muses.

"I designed many of them, like the Tarantula. Of course, I did a few I prefer to forget, like the Gibbon, a big monkey, and the Kangaroo—at least I didn't give him big hind legs! I even did Ms. Marvel."

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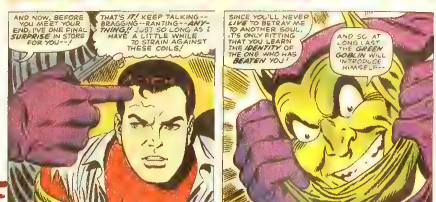
I MIGHT BE ABLE TO BREAK THESE FREE! ALLOW ENOUGH TIME!
BUT--NOW MUCH TIME WILL I GIVE ME?
YOU ARE PROBABLY WONDERING WHAT I HAVE IN STORE FOR YOU!
FIRST ASSURED IT WILL BE ONE YOU DESERVE!
I'VE GOT TO STALL FOR TIME--SOME-HOW!
YOU MIGHT AS WELL FINISH ME OFF RIGHT NOW--BECAUSE IF YOU DELAY--YOU END UP BEATING YOU--AS I DID IN THE PAST!
YOU NEVER BEAT ME!! IT WAS ALL ACCIDENTS!! I'LL PROVE IT--I'LL PROVE IT--BY ACCIDENTS! YOU CAN'T SUCK ME NOW! YOU'LL NEVER ESCAPE!
IT'S WORKING! HIS INSANE RAGE WON'T LET HIM DO WHAT I SUGGESTED!

Art: John Romita/Mike Esposito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SINCE YOU'LL NEVER LIVE TO BETRAY ME TO ANOTHER SOUL, IT'S ONLY FITTING THAT YOU LEARN THE IDENTITY OF THE ONE WHO HAS BEATEN YOU--
AND SO, AT LAST, I'LL INTRODUCE MYSELF!

TAKE A LOOK, PARKER--A GOOD LONG LOOK--IT'S THE LAST FACE SPIDER-MAN WILL EVER SEE!
IT'S THE REAL FACE OF THE GREEN GOBLIN--THE FACE OF NORMAN OSBORN!
THOSE FEATURES! AT LAST, I KNOW WHO--NO, NOT MY OWN CLASSMATE! IF YOU'RE HARRY OSBORN'S FATHER!
NEXT ISSUE
PIDEY AVES

Romita thought that unmasking the Green Goblin "was just another day in the Peter Parker saga."

Characters sometimes change. "When I was doing the Punisher in 1972, it was a tame version of today's Punisher because that's the way the world was then. We felt a vigilante who would shoot people without giving them a chance to explain or defend themselves was extreme. Now, after Vietnam, nothing is the same. When Neal Adams brought realism into comics, we've never gone back.

"For example, I don't like ugly people on every page of a comic. Extremely ugly people on every page is 'in' nowadays, as if artists are saying, 'This is an *ugly* world you've given me.' Only Jim Lee does pretty people; everybody else wants to do ugly ones."

Photo: Ken Regan/Courtesy CBS

Concerning Spidey film and TV attempts, Romita thinks "they were badly handled. The wrong approach."

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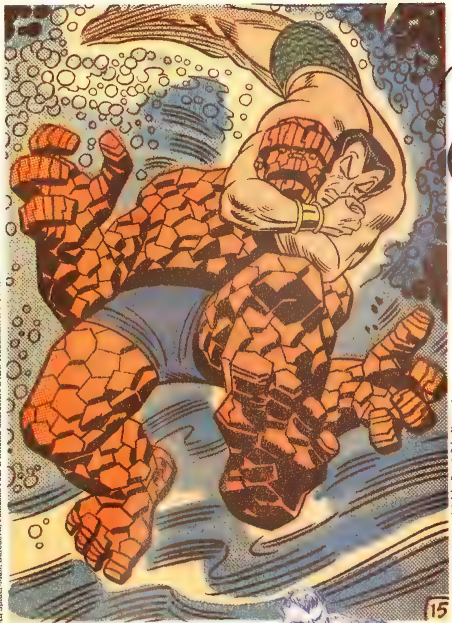

Art: John Romita/John Verpoorten

Liking all Marvel characters is one thing, drawing them is another. "If I had to do a whole story with the Thing, I would go crazy! All those rocks!"

Romita is currently embarking on a mysterious project with Stan Lee. "I'm assuming I can do it. I have about eight months to get it done, but haven't even scratched the surface yet. I want to do it because it's creator-owned; Stan and I would own the character, and that's attractive because I have nothing to call my own.

"I'm very nervous. If I thumbnail this story, 112 pages, four books, Stan can write it in two weeks, but it's gonna take me six months to do. I'm a slow plotter. It's a four-part mini-series for Epic. [Epic editor] Carl Potts seems to be all for it. It's a superhero, but *not* in a traditional sense. It's not a long underwear character. I look in the mirror and say, 'You must be crazy!' "

The artist finds re-teaming with Lee to be "interesting and challenging. We're 3,000 miles apart now. We've spoken three or four times by phone and met twice since we undertook this project. I don't know if I'll have the time or energy to do it," he admits. "My biggest disappointment is that I haven't done the body of work that guys like Jack Kirby and John Buscema have, and I worry people might think, 'Oh, he was just a playboy artist, who did it as a lark.' The truth is that I'm a *perfectionist*; the reason the strip wore me out is that I was never satisfied with it, and neither was Stan."

After that, Romita has specific plans for the future. "I think retirement is next for me," he says happily. "I'm over 60, and I look forward to having more time to myself. I have about 10 years' worth of reading to catch up on, and two granddaughters I would like to spend more time with."

Still, the artist is content, with few regrets in his illustrious career. John Romita leans back in his chair and smiles, as he sums up his career in one line: "I never got rich, but, thank God, I always made a living."

Romita's Punisher design went unmasked and unquestioned. "I was surprised when they didn't say anything about a mask. They liked masked characters."

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THE METEOR MAN

By DAN YAKIR

Look! Up on the screen! It's Robert Townsend as an all-new superhero!

All Meteor Man Photos: Copyright 1992 MGM

Superman. Batman. Spider-Man. And now...Meteor Man? The relatively exclusive list of comic book superheroes is now being expanded to include a new black superhero, possibly the first to retain his human frailties alongside his otherworldly powers. This hero's creator is Robert Townsend, who wrote and directed the $20-million movie *The Meteor Man*, in addition to starring as the lead. "As a kid, I *always* wanted to play a superhero," says Townsend. "And then I wanted to deal with the human values of being a hero and what a hero really is."

The Lilliputian explores all this through the character of Jeff, a timid Washington, D.C. schoolteacher who obtains magical powers—X-ray vision, the ability to fly—after he's hit in the chest by a glowing meteor, which dissolves into his skin. This changes him drastically from an uninvolved observer of urban violence who tells his students to "get on with much quicker and always be ready to run and hide, he turns into a bona fide hero.

"What happens initially is that when Jeff discovers his super-powers, he doesn't know what to do with them," he explains, "so he tells his mother [Marla Gibbs], and she tells the whole neighborhood, because she's proud of him. Right away she goes 'My son can fly! My son has X-ray vision,' and he reluctantly becomes a superhero, because of community pressure. He goes out to fight crime—and he's a good crimefighter—but what happens along the way is that people begin to rely on him a little bit too much, so that they don't do anything for themselves. That's where the Meteor's human side comes in: When one of his neighbours can't get her groceries

up to the third floor, she asks him to fly them up for her. People begin to abuse his powers.

"In the last part of the story, something happens and he really must deal with who he is and not so much with his power: that's where the change really happens. The only thing I would say without giving it away is that a Kryptonite thing happens which affects his powers, and he has to really deal with himself for a moment. And, when this goes down, the community puts that much more pressure on him and he says, 'Hey, I'm just one person!' In films and television, Superman and Batman always show up at the right time. In this story, what happens is that the hero doesn't show up at the right time. And if he is five minutes late..." Townsend says laughing, leaving his sentence unfinished.

Unlike other picture-perfect comic-book heroes, Townsend insists on making his Meteor Man a person with weaknesses—he's afraid of heights, which forces him to fly at a lower altitude than other veteran superheroes, and he also has a doting mother, which embarrasses him at times. "It all adds to the fact that he's a *real* person with real powers," says the director. Which is why his *super*-powers merely force him to reconfirm his own.

"Everyone has the ability to be a hero," notes Townsend. But does everyone have a costume designing mother like Marla Gibbs?

The villains of the piece – enemies of the community at large—are both young gangs and a crime syndicate. When Jeff destroys a local crack house, he in effect declares war not only on the Golden Lords, drug dealers extraordinaire, but on the syndicate that controls them.

"The Golden Lords are Afro-American boys with golden hair—it's dyed go.d," offers the filmmaker. "When I set out to create a supervillain, I wanted him to be based on reality. And it's based on a real gang named Simply Raw, which did everything by contract: If you came to work for the gang in the drug house, they had you sign a contract. They had rules and regulations about working for them—and all the rules led to death. If you used the product, it was death; if you told somebody about where you worked, death. But they were this elite gang; they dressed in designer suits, and so I've created designer suits for the Golden Lords, the hairstyles, everything. They look like a futuristic gang, but they're very much of the here and now."

According to Townsend, *The Meteor Man* explores the nature of heroism not simply along the lines of helping others improve their lot, but as getting in touch with one's own inner strength and realizing that hidden potential. "Everyone has the ability to be a hero," says Townsend. "It's just that they mostly choose not to be, not to help, not to make a difference. I mean, crime happens all the time, and somebody always sees it. There's always somebody who says, 'I saw somebody going into someone's house, but it ain't my house, so I'm going to keep walkin'" or, seeing someone breaking into a car, they can go to a phone booth and call the police and report the license plate number and describe the person. They say, 'I want to get involved.' But that's the only way to solve the country's social ills, the director insists, adding, "because the Meteor Man is a superhero of and for the '90s, he must convey the notion of everybody working together."

Indeed, Townsend believes that as the selfish 1980s are left behind, a new feeling of community is starting to emerge, one that is related to Bill Clinton's presidency. "People now are much more aware of looking out for each other," he maintains. "We shot part of the film during the LA riots, and I watched LA burn and then I saw it result, you know? During the election – the first thing that everybody said was about building a better world

As mild-mannered teacher Jefferson Reed, Robert Townsend faces evil, the Golden Lords (Another Bad Creation).

All Meteor Man Set Photos © First Look Pictures

Reed (Townsend) battles the Golden Lords leader (Roy Fegan) and must "deal with who he is and not so much with his powers."

for our kids, for ourselves. So, I wanted Meteor Man to be grounded in this quality of 'Hey, yeah, I'm one person, but if everybody else took that same attitude, there can be a lot of change.' The core, the fiber, of this superhero story is that *everybody's a hero.*"

Townsend, whose previous films—*Hollywood Shuffle* and *The Five Heartbeats*—had little to do with comics, in either style or substance, is a filmmaker shooting on anger and long on humor and optimism. "I'm from the old school, in terms of movies," smiles the director. "I grew up on Frank Capra. When you think of a movie like *It's a Wonderful Life*, you must realize there's something to be said for taking a person on a journey and giving him hope at the end of the rainbow.

"I believe that things *can* change for the better if everybody works together. It might sound corny or whatever, but I believe in the old-fashioned ideals of working hard, being honest and getting your due. In *The Meteor Man*, you are told that you can win. It's very simple, but this affirmation isn't heard often enough. People speak of crime with despair, and they speak of moving away. Jeff, too, says, 'I can't wait to get out of this neighborhood.' But what neighborhood will he move into? It nobody does anything, crime will spread everywhere until there's nowhere to go."

Townsend declares, "I believe in change and in positive energy. So, as a filmmaker, I believe in making films that give people hope, that give them something positive to hold on to. In this country—and it has been proven you can do anything you want to if you just work hard enough!"

His beliefs, not to mention his artistic formation, go back to childhood in an impoverished Chicago neighborhood. "We were so poor that I couldn't afford to buy comic books," he recalls, laughing. "Instead of buying a comic book, you could buy a sandwich and maybe two cokes. But I did watch *Superman* and *Batman* on TV, and they were my favorites. TV was a major influence—from *The Outer Limits* to *The Twilight Zone*. I liked the element that *anything* could happen, the element of surprise. So, watching what Superman could do while living in a ghetto in Chicago, I thought to myself, 'Wow! I want to do that one day.' These things stayed in my head..."

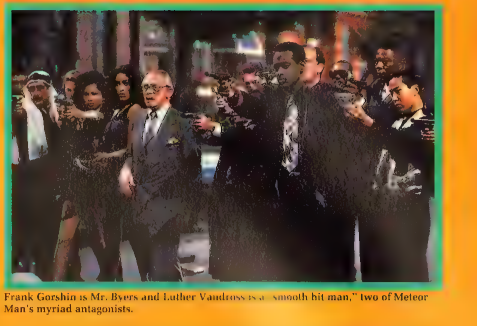
But the filmmaker was also attracted to big-screen heroes such as Errol Flynn, Ronald Coleman and Basil Rathbone. "Their speech and inflection he still mimics perfectly. "I created a scene in *Meteor Man* to evoke the flavor of the swashbuckling Flynn movies," he says. "It's actually a pipe fight instead of a sword fight. I grew up on these movies, so the character of Jeff has something of Danny Kaye in him—he was always avoiding responsibility until he would finally decide to go for it. With Jimmy Stewart, it was a similar thing. Those characters and movies inspired me to make this one."

Townsend, 33, maintains that as a rich fantasy life as a kid became more elaborate as he grew older. "I still remain in a child's state," he chuckles. "When I was a kid—and my mother will tell you this—I always said that I was an alien, that I came from another planet. I used to stay in the house a lot and watch television, and after the TV went off, I would create my own characters. I had voices for them and everything. In my imagination, because of what the world around me was like, I said, 'I'm going to create another world, where I can fly, where I can do all these things.' In *Meteor Man*, I

think I've tapped all those things in my head. It's an inner-city fairy tale, so you need to have the inner city—the serious side of the drugs and the crime and the gangs—but then you have magic in the middle of all of this, and the ability to fly."

Actually, the movie's foundation rests on more than the imaginary life of Townsend as a kid. "At the time, since I had no older brothers or cousins—I had an older sister—I had to run, because the gangs were trying to get me. And I would run! One day I stood up and fought back, and my life changed. It hit me like lightning—I realized I *could* do it! But, there was a point in my life where I was like, 'What if they hit me and knock me out and I don't? I would see someone on *Perry Mason* knock somebody down and they would hit their head on the ground and die. I thought it would happen to me. And when I finally stood up to this one bully, this guy named Reginald—I was in the fourth grade—I got in a fight and I said, 'I'm not running.' And my whole life changed, because it wasn't that bad; I could take the punishment, and I gave a little punishment, too."

In test screenings, moviegoers have especially enjoyed Marla Gibbs' shenanigans as Jeff's doting mother. For one, when she tries to get a proper costume for her son, she fails to get it right. And so it goes, again and again—and there are several costumes before she manages to perfect her creation. This may create the impression that the movie is spooting comic-book heroes –an impression enhanced by scenes showing Meteor Man rehearsing his lines, practicing saving people's lives, flying. "So, it's kind of spoofish on that kind of *limited* level," offers Townsend, "but in the final count, the movie is a *tribute* to superheroes.



Frank Gorshin is Mr. Byers and Luther Vandross is a "smooth hit man," two of Meteor Man's myriad antagonists.

There's no spoof involved once Jeff masters his craft and becomes one."

While Townsend found writing the script easy "I act out all my characters"—he says that as a director, he was challenged by the FX, as well as by having to use a huge VistaVision camera to accomplish them. "I've never done that before," he notes, "and it was important for me to keep the vision alive, to put on the storyboards the vision I had in my head."

For lack of a better word, Townsend's cast can be described as all-star.

Bill Cosby, who plays Marvin, "the homeless wizard," was available for six days of shooting outdoors, but it rained heavily on four of them. "So, we had to create indoor scenes to tell the story," says Townsend. "The character has mini-orgs and we couldn't get them to cooperate. So, I created a sequence where he does this magical thing with a cup of coffee. I don't want to give away the story, but he plays a man who finds a piece of the meteor and acquires a bit of magic.

"He's a pleasure to work with. A very disciplined actor, who did everything I asked him to. For a scene where he gets hit by one of the gang members, I wanted to use a stunt double, but he refused, saying, 'I have to take my own hits, because I've been doing this stuff since my days on *I Spy*.'"

James Earl Jones, who plays Mr. Moses, Jeff's apathetic neighbor, undergoes "plenty of changes in the story," according to Townsend. "He's a lovable man who loves jazz and old music, and then he becomes sad and serious and funny. When we filmed the emotional scenes with him trying to help Meteor Man cope with his dilemmas, it was so heartfelt! He went so deep, I had to constantly ask him if he was OK. It was like being in therapy."

The same goes for Marla Gibbs. She behaved like my own mother, like any woman who loves her child and is proud of him. We had a lot of fun the two of us. And then there was Robert Guillaume, who plays my father, who's this community leader trying to clean up the neighborhood. He then becomes the proud father of the Meteor Man. It's supposed to be a secret, but they keep telling *everybody*."

As Mr. Byers, the head of the crime cartel and the Meteor Man's nemesis, Townsend cast Frank Gorshin, as a homage to his character on TV's *Batman*. "When I met him, I told him that the Riddler was one of my favorite characters, and that I would be honored if he would do a part in this film." recalls the moviemaker. "Frank is a very funny man. If he would forget a line or something, suddenly you would get James Cagney, saying, 'Top

(continued on page 61)

A reluctant superhero, Jeff Reed (Townsend) dons the Meteor Man persona "because of community pressure."

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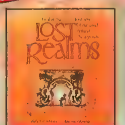

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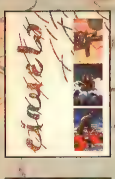

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DEATHWATCH 2,000

By DREW BITTNER

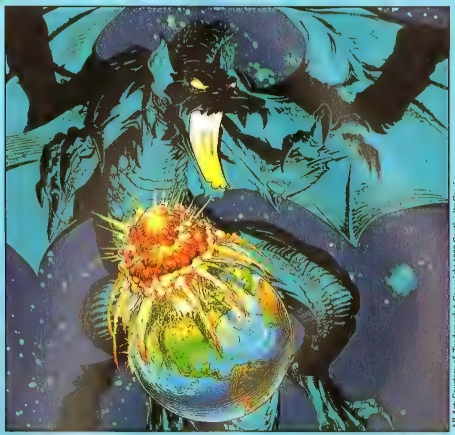
It's the end of the world as we know it. At least, that's what faces the heroes of Continuity Comics. It's all part of a blockbuster re-launch of six titles in an 18-part mega-crossover known as *Deathwatch 2000*. If the heroes can't stop it, Earth dies in a matter of days. Peter Stone, who's co-writing all six titles with Neal Adams, describes this oncoming Armageddon as Continuity's way of re-introducing readers to their stable of characters.

"*Deathwatch 2000* involves most of Continuity's major characters [Megalith, Shaman, CyberRad, Armor, Silverstreak, Ms. Mystic and others as described by Adams in CS #27], including a new group called Hybrids. It'll last for three months, with prelude issues of both *Megalith* and *Hybrids* that build some foundations for the story," Stone says, "but you won't *need* to have read them to enjoy the series.

"The overview of the crossover is that life on Earth will end in the year 2000 A.D., and the Hybrid group has come to witness this tragic event. They learn that someone's trying to bring that cataclysmic deadline *forward*."

Destruction is being brought about by mankind's reckless use of poisonous chemicals, Stone adds, and the careless disposal of toxic and radioactive waste. Several environmental crises come to a head at the same time, threatening worldwide doom.

"Earth is slowly being destroyed through chlorofluorocarbons that ruin the ozone layer, toxic waste poisoning the ground, and so on. Alien races have analyzed the situation and know that by 2000, Earth will kill itself. Someone here wants to have that happen faster—it's an underground race called the Titans; they can't stand exposure to daylight and want to kill everything on the surface so that they can take over. Naturally, the heroes have to stop it."



All Art: Courtesy of, Trademark & Copyright 1993 Continuity Comics

As Earth faces its end, the Continuity characters get a new lease on life.

A worldwide menace calls for a major villain, and Stone has one ready for the job. "Our central villain is a guy called Dragon," he says. "He appears as a normal human most of the time, but combat or the threat of danger transforms him into this huge dragon creature. For super-powered henchmen, we have the Hellbenders, these five irradiated supervillains. This group was horribly mutated by radiation, and the only way they can survive is through magic. The Dragon keeps them alive; he keeps the radiation in their systems from killing them, but they need that same radiation to

fuel their powers."

In Stone's estimation, the radiation-mutated Hellbenders are more pathetic than terrifying, even though they're evil at the outset. "They're linked irrevocably to the Dragon, but they don't like being mutated, irradiated and dependent on magic. They start off totally horrible and vicious, but they gradually become more human, more tragic as we learn more about them. They're not completely evil. When they learn about the Dragon's plan to destroy all life on Earth, they're not sure they want to be part of that."

To kick things off, both *Megalith* and *Hybrids* will publish issue #0's. Stone affirms that these issues are "basically giveaways, so we're trying not to make them essential [to the crossover]. You'll be able to understand the story without reading either book; if you're unable to get them, you can enjoy the series as a whole.

"Our aim is to give readers a chance to get into these series and characters. We don't have a long history like *X-Men* or *Spider-Man*, so we want to catch new readers early and give them all the story and background parts they need so that they don't get frustrated or bored and lose interest.

"Each book is focused on the main character, and we follow the action through that character's eyes; we see how they're personally interacting with the rest of the Continuity heroes," Stone says. "We don't do the Marvel or DC thing, starting off the action in one book and all the heroes gang up to go

Art: Malcom Davis/Neal Adams/Chris Ivy

Megalith gets the Hybrids fired up to join him in the fight against the Deathwatch.

Art: Sal Velluto/Rudy Nebres

the same way. We *won't* have every character in every book. Characters come in and do what they have to do, then leave or go on with new business. For example, Megalith crosses with the Hybrids early on and they have a series of adventures, they split up, then Meg rejoins the Hybrids for the climax."

The writer says this focus on individual characters was necessary. Given the story's scope, he admits, it's a challenge to provide each character with his own piece of the action. "We're trying to get kids involved in our heroes in a sort of one-on-one way. With 13 heroes, how are you going to focus on

Continuity's new heroes, the Hybrids (from far left, clockwise: Mite, Gymcrack, Spanng, Horror, Shealth, Hyperion and Cyclone on the bottom), came to watch the destruction of Earth, but end up fighting to save it.

Hybrids get fired up, and they split up and gather as many heroes as they can to search out trouble spots all over the world. Megalith goes with Shealth and Mite, to protect this really powerful particle accelerator at a hi-tech factory. The Titans come out of the ground to take it away, so there's a series of adventures.

"Meanwhile, Ms. Mystic senses something is wrong and travels to South America, where she encounters two Hybrids trying to prevent this city of dinosaurs from pouring chlorofluorocarbons into the atmosphere, to demolish the ozone layer and let ultraviolet radiation kill off humans."

This "lost city of dinosaurs" won't feature lumbering monsters. Stone promises that the residents are quite dangerous to these 20th-century superheroes.

The *Armor* stories "read like *Under Siege*," says Stone. "A guy alone against enemies just as dangerous as he is."

Art: Kevin Nowlan

each one if they're all ganged together? In *Megalith*, you'll get some other characters besides Megalith, but he's really the focus: the story revolves around what *he* does, not what the guest stars do."

The action unfolds as the Hybrids try to resolve their moral crisis. Save Earth or watch it take its natural path to destruction. Fortunately for Earth, a very persuasive spokesman speaks up.

"Megalith convinces them they have to save the planet, in a pretty dramatic way," Stone says. "The

"These are technologically proficient dinosaurs, with vehicles and weapons equal to our own. They're a lost race that got stuck in suspended animation, who wake up and quickly realize the whole planet's covered with these horrible squishy things. They want humans dead, mutated or out of the way, so they're causing ecological devastation to make that happen."

Another hero, CyberRad, is a hi-tech champion whose involvement comes about through magic. The mysterious Shaman has a hand in bringing him into the Deathwatch story.

"Shaman recognizes the Hellbenders' destructive power and decides he's going to use CyberRad as a covert agent," Stone says. "He sends him to a particular place deep underground, where only CyberRad can destroy this vital piece of machinery. We show CyberRad fighting his way un-

A hi-tech wonder, CyberRad gets involved with the struggle because he's the perfect choice for a certain battle.

Art: Dwayne Turner/Chris Ivy

The Continuity heroes travel the world trying to stop the threat. Ms. Mystic goes to South America and finds some elemental help.

Art: Richard Bennett

derground, where his technological knowledge and built-in weaponry make him the perfect choice to destroy this machinery."

The elemental foursome known as Earth 4 assume a pivotal place in the fight: They know more than they realize about what's happening and how to stop it. "Earth 4 gets drawn into battle by some of the Hybrids, who know Earth 4 is linked to Earth and that they must have information about where Dragon's major plan is in motion. At the same time, the bad guys recognize Earth 4 as dangerous to their plans, so they try to simultaneously destroy the Hybrids and Earth 4," Stone explains.

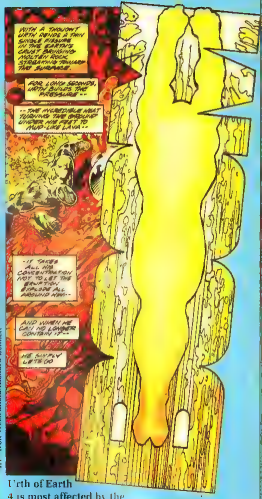
Earth 4 is surprised by all the furor over them, especially since they only have the dimmest insight into the events. "They suspect something's wrong, because they've been feeling it for weeks, but they don't know exactly what it is. Urth especially feels it, since he's so tightly bound to the planet itself. It's like an organ in your body being diseased or corrupted – when people drop toxic waste, Urth knows it. The Hybrids help sort things out and give them direction, so that by the first issue's end, Earth 4 understands. They're ready to fight."

Meanwhile, in the hard-hitting martial arts/hi-tech *Armor*, the Hellbenders prove ambitious: They take over an aircraft carrier.

"They say they're going to sail it to the Middle East and cause trouble, when in reality they want the nuclear missiles stored on the carrier. The first fight takes out both Silverstreak and Scarlet Streak [Armor's brother and sister], leaving Armor to fight alone.

The Hellbenders – clockwise from upper left: Hellheart, Void, Rem, Leper and Hellfire—"are in a no-win situation," says Stone.

Art: Joel Lelunis-Kuda, Nadroes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HE GENTLY LETS GO

Art: Ivan Nunziata/Richard Bennett

Urth of Earth 4 is most affected by the recent happenings on Earth. "When people drop toxic waste," Stone explains, "Urth knows it."

His stories read like *Die Hard* or *Under Siege*: A guy alone against enemies just as dangerous as he is. We also introduce Scarlet Streak early on, once the series is underway, we'll go back and explore who she is and where she was when Armor and Silverstreak were knocking around before."

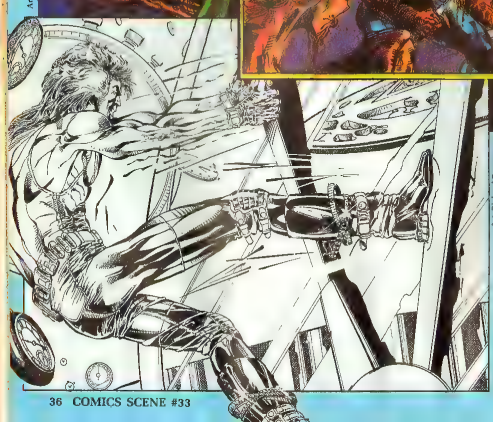
Which brings Stone to *Hybrids*. The last two Hybrids set off for the deepest recesses of the underground to obtain crucial information, seeking the Mother Earth character that Adams and Stone tucked away down in Titan territory.

"They have to get past all sorts of horrible creatures, just to ask this Earth-spirit for help in fighting the Dragon and the Hellbenders," notes Stone. "And once that mission's over, these two link up with the rest of their team and the other Continuity heroes."

Coordinating and co-writing all these titles has been a tremendous task, especially in terms of establishing who's where and what ties in with what. Stone admits the effort has been phenomenal, but hopes the readers find it worthwhile.

"There are 18 crossover issues altogether, and we've tried hard to nail

EAT STEEL, SCUM BAT!
HA
ARRR
Art Neal Adams
HM. WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO LITH KAST... YOU'VE -- YOU'VE -- WHO ARE YOU?
I'M YOUR BIG BROTHER KID... WOULDN'T EXPECT YOU TO REMEMBER, AND I'M TAKIN' YOU HOME.
...IF YA WANNA COME.
FLAP FLAP FLAP RRRROUGH!
IF YOU DECIDE TO STAY HERE, I'M AFRAID THINGS COULD GET A BIT DICEY.
She is done. She says happily, the first issue is over.



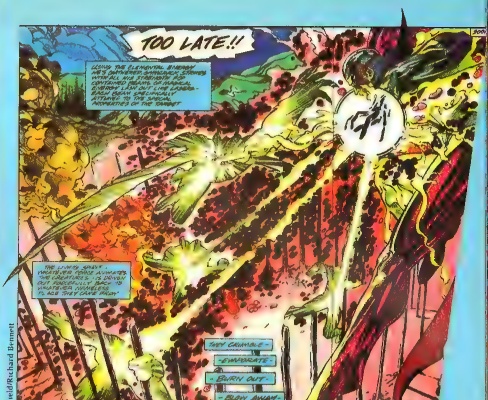
everything down before we launch the first issue," he says. "It's not exactly like [DC Comics'] *Watchmen*, where every piece of each story is significant, but everything should work out."

Stone is listed as scripter on all six titles, but says that in working with Adams, he did contribute some plot material. "Neal did and will do most of the plotting, while I'm doing scripting and dialogue," he says. "Some of my ideas are in there—it gets to be hard to say exactly who does what, because it's very collaborative."

Mixing magic and mechanics, CyberRad takes on the Deathwatch from underground as Shaman's covert agent.

GHF
ANYWAY YOU'VE GOT TO DECIDE REAL QUICKLY MY PALS WON'T BE ABLE TO HOLD OFF THIS GUYS PALS MUCH LONGER.
I'VE BEEN TRYIN' TO COME TO GET YOU FOR SIX YEARS, KID. IT TOOK ALL THAT TIME TO FIND A BUNCH OF GUYS THAT WERE WILLING TO GO TO HELL... AND BACK WITH ME.
YOU... WANT TO GET OUT OF HERE.
JUST GIVE ME A WEAPON... SO THAT I CAN KILL SOME OF THESE LEECHES AS WE GO.

Despite the anti-pollution stand in *Deathwatch 2000*, Stone doesn't believe that the titles' pro-ecology message will be viewed as overly blatant. "There's a danger in even saying that there's some subtext in these books, because readers will think, 'Oh no, they're gonna be *preaching* at me.' If anything, we're trying to slip a message in between the lines. The thing driving our books is action and adventure, pure and simple. I promise, *nobody* will hold up a styrofoam cup and accuse it of destroying Earth—who wants to read that? Maybe, after you read the whole series, you might have it somewhere in the back of your mind that destroying the ozone layer *is* a bad thing, but we won't be hitting you over the head. Otherwise, we would be Soapbox Comics."


TOO LATE!!
LOOSE THE ELEMENTAL BIRTHRAY OF THE HYBRIDS WHICH ARE ARMED WITH ALL NEW AUTOMATIC FLAME CONTAINED BEAMS OF MAGICAL ENERGY! BUT THE LOSS CANNOT EXCEED THE NORMAL PARAMETERS OF THE TOURNEY
THE LORDS SPENT HUNDREDS YEARS CREATING THE CREATURES. A DEVICE WAS BUILT INTO EACH ONE TO MAKE SURE THEY CAME BACK!
KEEP GRINDING IT IN
I'M WORKIN'
BURN OUT
RUN AWAY
I'M DOING MY BEST, I'VE NEVER RUN!

Art: Aron Wiesenfeld/Richard Bennett

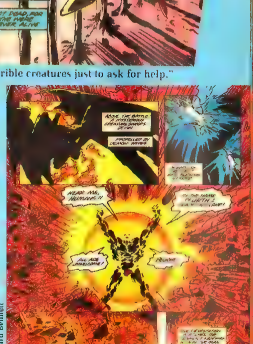
"The Hybrids have to get past all sorts of horrible creatures just to ask for help," Stone explains.

On a personal front, Stone admits that scripting six titles simultaneously is a feat of stamina and ingenuity.

"Kris [Adams, VP/Associate Publisher at Continuity] says I'm challenging [Marvel's] Fabian Nicieza for the title 'Hardest Working Man in Comics.' Personally, I don't think I'll *ever* do eight books at a time. I'm going to have to make a decision on which books I'll stay with. Basically, I'll be working on everything for at least three months and after that—we'll see."

For *Deathwatch 2000*, though, the entire plot has been laid down like a blueprint. Stone says his task in some cases has been filling in the blanks of this grand design.

"It's nice that we have the ability to look at the whole story and know where it'll go, because that allows me to do more characterization," he says. "I'm more concerned with how the story works and how these people interact than worrying what'll happen in the next issue and where the action goes. Neal leaves notes when we assemble the books, like, 'We need four pages of action here.' It has a give-and-take relationship. It has also been one of the more satisfying things I've done.



Art: Aron Wiesenfeld/Richard Bennett

Although the ecological tone may seem preachy, Stone counters, "The thing driving our books is action."

The artists are some of the best I've worked with, and everyone's proud of the finished product."

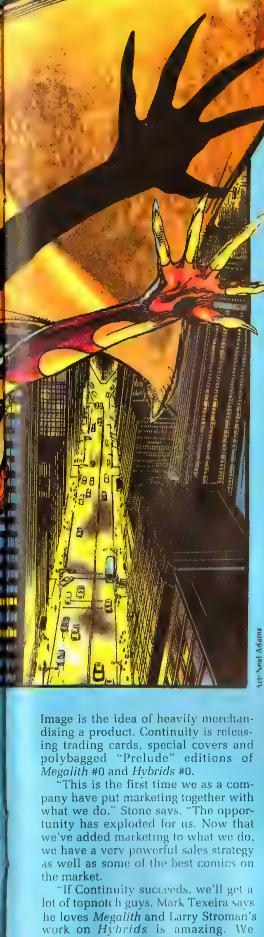
One of the highlights of working at Continuity is seeing the legendary Adams in action.

BURN!
BURN!
I... I'M NOT SURE I'M FOLLOWING!
SUFFICE IT TO SAY, WE'RE ABOUT TO HAVE A GOOD TIME!
WELCOME TO THE 90'S, BOYS! THIS IS FOR THE BIG BUCKS!
WHAT'S THIS? A LOOK INTO THE FUTURE?
WELL, LOOKS LIKE OUR FRIENDS ARE GOING TO BE RICH AND FAMOUS!
Art: Sal Velluto/Rudy Nebres

The Hellbenders "might wind up living on the fringe of things," Stone says.

"I had never seen Neal draw an actual superhero comic," Stone reflects. "But now, he'll come in one morning and throw a page in front of me and say 'How's this?' and it blows me away. When I came into the comics business, Neal hadn't done much for awhile, so it has been fantastic to see him step back in. The way we see it, the Image guys sent out a challenge: 'Now we're creators and we're doing our own thing and making tons of money.' Neal's responding to that challenge, because it can only be good for the whole industry. He has said for a long time that there wasn't much competition out there, but now we have guys at Image really pushing the envelope of what *can* be done in comics. Why shouldn't we do the same?"

One major lesson learned from



Art: Neal Adams

Image is the idea of heavily merchandising a product. Continuity is releasing trading cards, special covers and polybagged "Prelude" editions of *Megalith* #0 and *Hybrids* #0.

"This is the first time we as a company have put marketing together with what we do," Stone says. "The opportunity has exploded for us. Now that we've added marketing to what we do, we have a very powerful sales strategy as well as some of the best comics on the market.

"If Continuity succeeds, we'll get a lot of topnotch guys. Mark Texeira says he loves *Megalith* and Larry Stroman's work on *Hybrids* is amazing. We would love to have Larry stay on, but I think he may stick with [Image's] *Tribe* (see page 13) for awhile. Who knows? It all depends on what an artist's demands are and whether we can accommodate them. We get an artist, who wants a specific inker to do a book, and we'll move the world to make that happen."

Stone says that further new Continuity titles are planned, including the return of *Grazyman* ("We all love the guy around here," he notes), a possible *Toyboy* digest, and maybe teams' *Werebred* team or *She-Bat*, of which a first issue is finished. Shaman, figuring prominently in *CyberRad*, is a definite candidate for his own title, especially when Continuity publishes the *Rise of Magic* crossover this year.

Although the Hellbenders may rethink their priorities, they probably won't become good guys. "They're not heroes as we view heroes." Stone declares. "They live in the darkness and need radiation and magic—I doubt they would end up as heroes. They might wind up as characters living on the fringe of things. They'll pop up here and there in some books down the road, but won't necessarily be as evil as in *Deathwatch 2000*."

Continuity has been notorious in the past for its production and distribution delays. With a negative reputation to overcome, Stone says that a fresh start with a huge marketing campaign was the best scenario.

"We never started out to do comics monthly, because we were doing them as a sideline. We never decided with any real conviction to do [comics] to make money," he says. "Then, when many big changes happened recently in the industry, we sat back and realized we weren't doing marketing or appealing to the direct sales market the way we could. So, Kris and Neal thought we should make a new start of things. We needed new capital, so we searched awhile and found a group willing to invest in Continuity." He prefers not to identify their benefactors. "Now we can do trading cards and big-time advertising. Instead of just seeing a *Ms Mystic* cover on the shelf, now you'll see it *everywhere*."

The rise of companies like Image fueled Adams' willingness to give it his best, Stone says. "Neal stepped back and said there are companies with nothing on us except for advertising and marketing, and they're doing phenomenally well. We have excellent books, but we couldn't give them away. So, the plan for 1993 was to make marketing our priority. Everyone wants to make *Deathwatch 2000* a big splash, to be memorable."

"Everyone we've talked to has been overwhelmingly supportive," Stone enthuses. "The response has exceeded expectations."

Art: Alex Wasserdile/Richard Bennett

Alongside the Hybrids, Earth 4 will face the Hellbenders' wrath.

As for the initial response to *Deathwatch*, Stone says it has been unbelievable.

"The response not only exceeded expectations, but we had really expected an uphill battle because of our reputation. Know what? Everyone we've talked to has been overwhelmingly supportive. We've done enough work to prove to any naysayers that there are no creative problems. Hey, *She-Bat* is done, the first issue is ready. I think everyone's surprised and pleased."

He does admit that running a company, going from talent to top management, is a difficult hurdle. "I hope that the things we went through don't happen to Image," he says. "They've already had scheduling problems with some books, and we know what that's like. Once you decide to form a company, you throw yourself into the arena. As an artist, you don't worry about who answers the phone or calls for collecting fees, who signs the checks and pays the bills. I see how much Neal does and he's still drawing 18 hours a day. Running a company demands a great deal of time and effort to get the product out—it really is one of the toughest things in the world."

However, Stone says that the gloomy days are past and Continuity looks forward to a brilliant future. All they have to do is get past the end of life on Earth.

"This is one of the best-looking crossovers I've ever seen. Most times, one or two books in a big multi-title story are interesting, and the rest are filler or below average; in this one," Peter Stone announces, "every single book is great."

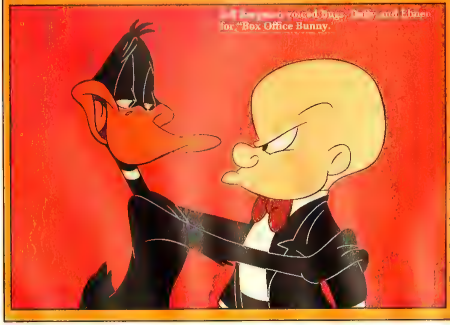
A VOICE FOR LOONEY TUNES

Animation: Mike Kazaleh/Courtesy Nancy Beiman

After Mel Blanc died in 1989, Warner Bros. needed someone to provide voices for the sadly silenced Looney Tunes gang. One of their choices was Jeffrey Bergman.

"I've been working on this stuff nearly half my life," says Bergman, who had first auditioned for the roles in 1986. "I made a tape with all the voices on it, and got a meeting with Warners. [Writer/director] Greg Ford was there, and they took a liking to it. Nothing happened because Mel was still alive, and they had complete respect for him.

"After Mel Blanc died, they started to do *Tiny Toons*, which I think is really good compared to much of the stuff on Saturday morning TV. It might not be what the classic characters are, but I don't think anybody expected that. I was involved with re-creating the classic Looney Tunes voices for *Tiny Toons*."



Jeff Bergman voiced Bugs, Daffy and Elmer for "Box Office Bunny."

Box Office Bunny Copyright 1990 Warner Bros. Inc.

Eventually, Bergman voiced Bugs Bunny, Daffy and Elmer in the 1991 theatrical short, "Box Office Bunny," directed by Darrell Van Citters. He voiced these characters, plus Yosemite Sam, for the "Invasion of the Bunny Snatchers" and "Blooper Bunny," directed by Greg Ford and Terry Lennon. In the TV special, *Bugs Bunny's Lunar Tunes*, Bergman voiced Bugs Bunny, Marvin the Martian and the Martian Judge for director Nancy Beiman.

"We did my part of the soundtrack [for "Bunny Snatchers"] over a year-and-a-half ago," Bergman recalls. "It was a pleasure to do a real cartoon, and have the luxury to spend the time on each voice.

"It took a long time, because you look at storyboards, and you want to treat each character very separately 'cause they're so different.

"We did it with *Lunar Tunes*, too. In fact, Nancy [Beiman] is a stickler about that—which I love. It helps me see what I'm reading. When you do special projects like this one, the animation director brings the boards and we go through them, so I have a reference when I read the lines.

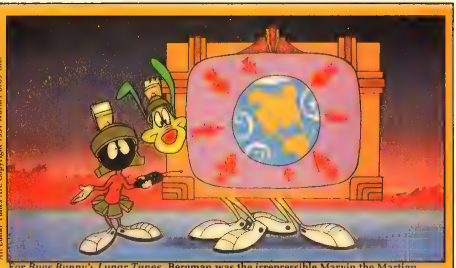
"That's the way they did it in the old days. They had [composer] Carl Stalling there. Milt Franklyn, Chuck Jones (or whoever was directing), Mel and the boards, and they really got into it. And it shows in the work."

Bergman points out, "With *Tiny Toons*, it's a 65-half-hour effort, so you don't have *time* to look at boards. You're under the gun, so you never look at anything. You don't have the same idea of what the action really is. Basically, the director gives you a line reading, or you take a guess at it, or if it's close enough, you go on to the next thing. So, I had no luxury of having the storyboards available to me."

When Mel Blanc spoke as Daffy Duck, his voice was basically Sylvester "speeded up" on tape. Does this happen with Bergman?

"Well, I can do it naturally, but, sometimes it sounds better [sped up]," he says. "When Mel did it, he would say [assumes Daffy's voice], 'Yes, look no further, for I am he for whom thou seekest, for I am Robin Hood.' That's pretty close, but to maintain it after a while, there might be a little strain. So to take the edge off it, they speed it. *I* think it sounds better when they speed it. Very slightly, like two to five percent."

Bergman also voiced two other characters originally done by Blanc—Barney Rubble for Pebbles cereal, and Mr. Spacely in *Jetsons: The Movie*. According to Bergman, *Jetsons* had been three-quarters complete, when he was called to do Spacely, and also George Jetson, because George O'Hanlon had died.



All Lunar Tunes Art Copyright 1993 Warner Bros. Inc.

For *Bugs Bunny's Lunar Tunes*, Bergman was the irrepressible Marvin the Martian.

His other roles include Charlie the Tuna for Starkist, and Popeye as the spokesman for Quaker Oats, plus other voices for children's concerts.

"I had the good fortune to create voices for Serge Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf* for the Boston Pops," says Bergman. "It was really fun. We may take that on tour around the country. But it was exciting performing at the Pops symphony hall."

Meanwhile, Bergman hopes to continue his collaboration with Ford and Lennon. During recording sessions, Bergman says, "Greg always keeps the tape rolling and the mike on, because he never knows what I'm going to say. Invariably, they use stuff like that in the actual takes. It really adds to the gags.

"In 'Bunny Snatchers,' we were trying to come up with a way that Daffy could have even more disdain when he says, 'You're despicable.' We just came up with so much frustration that he said, [as Daffy] 'You're *un-SPEAKably* despicable!'

"We have a lot of fun. We really do. Anything can happen."

—Bob Miller

Bunny Snatchers Art Copyright 1993 Warner Bros. Inc. All Characters Trademark & Copyright 1993 Warner Bros. Inc.

IMAGES IN BRONZE

For more than a decade, artist Bob Larkin produced Doc Savage's images of bronze.

Photo: Courtesy Bob Larkin

By RICH W. HARVEY

When Bantam Books awarded artist Bob Larkin the *Doc Savage* series, they gave him some mighty shoes to fill. Cover artists James Bama, Fred Pfeifer and Boris Vallejo had revitalized the Man of Bronze for a new era of paperback readers, leaving a permanent impression on fans everywhere.

"Len Leone was the art director in '76," Larkin recalls, "and he said to basically go with the Jim Bama look that was previously done with the other books. Len was actually the guy who got Jimmy started doing the cover art in '64."

Fans had become spoiled by Bama's superior portraits, and the search was on for an artist who could adapt to the unique style that Bama had created for the series, a trademark look followed by later artists Pfeifer and Vallejo. Larkin's earlier work for Marvel Comics (mostly color covers for the black-and-white magazines) displayed excellent figure drawing and a keen eye for realistic detail, elements that had also made Bama's work so popular.

"In the beginning, I did Jimmy's monochromatic look," Larkin says. "Then, I slowly broke away from that and decided to do my own thing. Basically, I brought the Marvel style of action and color to Doc Savage."

Larkin began producing covers that might have been mistaken for Bama's early work, except that Doc Savage appeared too old and wrinkly, with early attempts such as *Ost* [reprinted as #89 *The Magic Island*] and *The Tunnel Terror*. He soon corrected this problem with the dynamic cover to *The Hate Genius*, which proved he could do justice to the Savage saga.

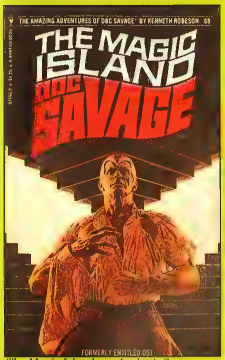
"I wasn't really used to painting Doc, so I just made him older," says Larkin. "But as time went on, I started making him younger. The model I was using at the time, Steve Holland, hasn't changed at all, though *he* is a little wrinklier."

Holland, in fact, has played Doc Savage longer than any Hollywood actor ever will. Known for his TV portrayal of Flash Gordon in the '50s, ex-actor Holland posed for the very first paperback cover, Bama's classic Doc portrait for *The Man of Bronze*, and still models today for current *Doc* artist Joe DeVito.

"Jim Avaiti painted a couple of covers, and I think he used himself as a model, but Steve's basically the one who posed for all the Docs. Steve was doing everybody—he was posing for all the Westerns, and he was on every damn book cover for awhile.

"On the cover to *The Three Wild Men* (#121), there are three guys in the foreground, and Doc is in the background with the Manhattan skyline behind him. *All* of those characters are Steve, posing four different ways. Jimmy [Bama] did the same thing when he was painting Doc. It's easier to pay one model instead of getting a few up there, so we just used Steve for all of the poses. Steve is a very thin model, and I would completely redraw him by building up the muscles and the thick neck, and that's pretty close to what Jimmy was doing."

After Larkin had produced a mere 10 covers, Bantam's new *Doc Savage* publishing policy changed. Now two shorter novels, from the pulp magazine's digest-sized period, were reprinted in each paperback. Front covers were split in half, leaving plenty of space up top for the



The Magic Island was Larkin's first attempt at painting Doc. "I just made him older," the artist admits.

Bantam's double-novel format of the early '80s increased the action potential as well as the deadline pressure.

Typographical demands of the later omnibus reprint format limited Larkin's work to classic Doc poses.

distinctive *Doc Savage* logo; each story would have an individual cover painting. The smaller dimensions proved no problem for Larkin, who could place more action into scenes now free of cluttering type, but other difficulties surfaced.

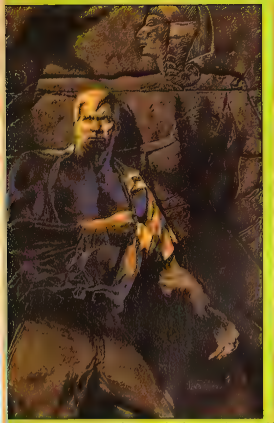
"I would have one warm-color painting, and the other had to be a cool color," he explains. "There would have to be a green cover and an orange cover, or a blue and a red, just to provide contrast. They were also tough because I had to deliver them both at the same time, so I was under a lot of pressure with the double-Docs. Sometimes they would be late, and there was no time to print them or do corrections, and that was a real problem."

As a result, the double-novel edition of the already reprinted (in 1967) *The Czar of Fear* #21 and *Fortress of Solitude* #22 featured a new Larkin painting for *Fortress* and a reprint of Bama's original *Czar* cover. A similar problem occurred with the reissue as a double-novel of *Secret in the Sky* #19 and *Cold Death* #20, which resulted in the reprinting of vintage Bamas.

"It was weird how the series' cover format changed," says Larkin. "Originally, when I started in 1977, I would just do *one* cover. Then, we went to the double-Docs, where I could actually stretch Doc out and draw the complete figure. Then, with the omnibus series, we went right back to where we started. They wanted Doc up

When he first took over the paperbacks, Larkin employed noted Savage artist James Bama's monochromatic look.

Sometimes, Larkin sneaked in Doc's aides. That's Monk Mayfair under the gun on *The Screaming Man* (above right).



One warm and one cool color painting provided contrast on the double novels.

close for the omnibus books because of the type involved. There were an average of [four to] six titles in each omnibus, with the Doc logo the same."

The mechanics of the paintings proved far easier to overcome than editorial policies. Larkin was allowed to paint covers in his own style, providing that Doc Savage's modern look—the classic torn shirt, jodhpurs and boots initiated by Bama—remained intact.

"They say, 'Don't fix what ain't broke,' and every time I tried to get away from that, the art director said, 'No, I want the ripped shirt.' The full-color stuff is the only thing I managed to get away with. And getting a little bit more action in the figures, instead of the stiff, fine-art look that Jimmy Bama was using."

During the double-novel period, Larkin suggested painting one illustration with the distinctive torn shirt, and allowing another costume on the companion cover. The art director declined, and Doc Savage showed up better dressed only on the covers to *Fortress of Solitude*, *Peril in the North* and *The Lost Giant*, all stories with an Arctic setting.

"There were so many times when I wanted to put Doc in a whole different outfit," Larkin laments, "but they just *never* went for it. I wanted to put him in a tuxedo once, or maybe throw in the Empire State Building, but they said, 'No way.' I was going to try it with *no* shirt one time—maybe Doc could have torn it off, and had it in his hand—but they said no, the shirt has to be on him.

"I tried to get a few more of his men on there, like Ham or Renny. I got away with it a few times—Monk showed up because he looked like a gorilla, so he was perfect. I had always wanted to put Doc's cousin Pat Savage on a cover. I had come up with a couple of sketches where Pat was involved, and they said, '*No* women on the covers.' "

When the series went to its omnibus format, the cover typography so restricted the artwork that a return to the iconographic Doc Savage pose—waist up, elbows bent for the fists—was necessary. Action poses were no longer possible, and Larkin's attempts to bring new elements to the Savage art would have been wasted.

"After awhile, I gave up on it. The art director would tell me to just play it safe, and not change it at all, so I was stuck."

Larkin's biggest problem was the torn shirt itself. For such an unassuming little rag—which even prompted Bantam's advertising department to proclaim, "Doc needs a new shirt!" in their old poster promotion—Larkin laughingly recalls this as his toughest challenge.

"The original ripped shirt that Jimmy Bama used disappeared," he explains. "Steve Holland still has the jodhpurs and the boots, but not the original shirt. I had to find a new ripped shirt for Doc and make it look *exactly* like the old one, but it was quite impossible. I tried to tear it up the way Jimmy did, but he always had that one thread holding the left side of the shirt together. I always wondered how he did that.

"I was always a fan of Doc," Larkin notes.

All Doc Savage Art: Bob Larkin

Says Larkin, "I brought the Marvel style of action and color to Doc Savage."

"Boris was involved with painting the Docs, and I think he was modeling himself and did his own ripped-shirt bit," Larkin recalls. "When Fred Pfeifer was doing Doc, he was using one of those no-press shirts. You couldn't wrinkle it up no matter how much you tried, because it was made of polyester.

"Finally, I got one of my father's shirts from World War II and tore it to pieces, and that was the one I used. Joe DeVito now has my ripped shirt, which he's using for the new Doc Savage illustrations."

Today, the 43-year-old artist resides in New York State, surrounded by his numerous paintings, classic and in progress. The basement holds a few of his Doc Savage originals, including some covers by the other artists.

"I was always a fan of Doc," says Larkin. "In fact, I have *all* of the original novels. I remember my father telling me about it, and he had a few of the originals—but when he passed away, my mother just couldn't remember where he hid 'em! So, *somewhere*

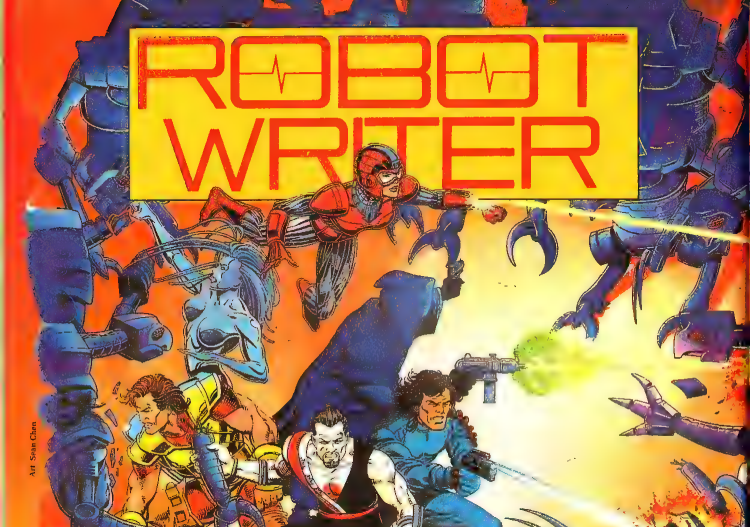
(continued on page 56)

Doc Savage Character Copyright 1990 Conde Nast Publications, Inc.

Doc always had to wear a trademark torn shirt, but Larkin was allowed to clothe him for *The Lost Giant*.

Longtime Savage model Steve Holland also worked for Larkin, but they had to get a new torn shirt.

ROBOT WRITER



Art: Sean Chen

As he scripts Valiant's heroic future, John Ostrander is more d

John Ostrander is *still* one of the busiest writers in comics. In a business where creators suffer burnout regularly, Ostrander has added Valiant's *Magnus, Robot Fighter* and *Rai and the Future Force* to his already formidable workload—and has started informal comics scripting seminars on the side!

The new two titles essentially put the writer in charge of Valiant's future, and that suits Ostrander just fine.

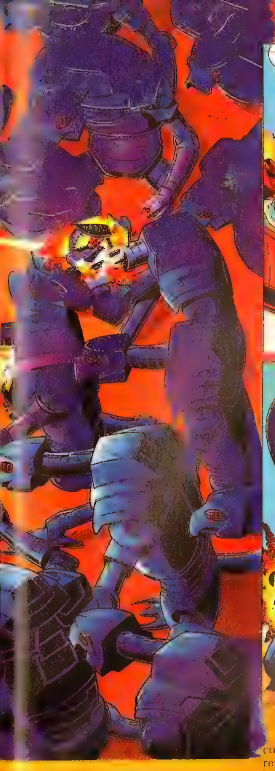
"When *Suicide Squad* ended, I was working on some independent projects and looking to branch out from DC," he says. "I had done a lot of work at DC over the years, and for a variety of reasons, I felt it was time to branch out. If you're identified with only *one* comic company, and you're not under contract, people think that you are exclusive, and it's not to your benefit.

"Valiant called and said, 'We've got this book, *Magnus*. We want a new direction for it. Would you be interested?' I said, 'You know, you caught me at just the right time.' I went in and we talked, and they said, 'Great!

"Then, when they decided to re-launch *Rai and the Future Force*, Bob Layton was too busy to write it. They said, 'Look, John's doing this already. Why doesn't he do the companion book?' Basically, they turned the future of the Valiant Universe over to me."

Magnus #21-#24, Ostrander's first four issues, set up the return of the evil robots known as the Malevs, robots with no compunctions about harming humans. After defeating Magnus and taking over North Am, they decide to turn Earth into Malev 7, killing several

By KIM HOWARD JOHNSON



Art: Sears Cheek/Kathryn Bolinger/Cadaver Bolinger

"In a book called *Magnus, Robot Fighter*, there are only three essential parts," Ostrander explains: "Magnus, robots and he should fight them."

verworked than usual.

members of the Elite's supporting cast. When the Malevs set their sights on Japan, Magnus rallies the heroes, who become *Rai and the Future Force* to defend the country in *Rai and the Future Force* #1. Team members include the X-O Commando (wife of the former Rai, who possesses the X-O Commando armor), the Eternal Warrior of the future, Tekla, and the mysterious Skylocke.

Several key events are planned for *Magnus* #25, according to the writer. "Magnus is going to get a new costume," he says. "There will be the return of Leeja, his robot mentor, but he's now known as 1-A-B. The robotic shell itself is much larger and can transform into a sky cycle that Magnus drives. It's a really cool-looking form of transportation for him."

When he agreed to take over *Magnus*, Ostrander was given a great deal of creative freedom.

"They said, 'Look, we've got a character called *Magnus, Robot Fighter*. Our problem is he has turned into Magnus, Robot *Talker*.' They wanted things shaken up pretty well, so I went into some of the old Gold Key/Western stories—the whole Malev storyline comes from there," he explains. "Magnus actually defeated Malev 6."

Ostrander says he went back to the source material in the original *Magnus* comics from the '60s in planning the series' future. "Several things had to happen. North America had to be blown up, and the Gophers had to be mulched," he says. "I decided that in order to bring people back, we would put the book into fourth gear and slam it into overdrive—keep it there for a couple of issues, and kill off some of the supporting cast—which I do on a regular basis. I eat worries people, I want them to take nothing for granted. In a book called *Magnus, Robot Fighter*, there are only three essential parts: Magnus, robots and he should fight them. Anything and everything else can be considered *optional*."

Spectre ™ & © Tom Mandrake Trademark Licensed by DC Comics, Inc.

"It's a great concept, but it has never worked quite right," the writer says of the Spectre. He's going to try.

The events in the massive *Unity* crossover shook up the Valiant Universe and affected every series; Ostrander says he's using some aspects of the event in his titles. "*Unity* established the actual birth of Magnus, although he himself isn't aware of that. In issue #25, he *does* become aware of it, and that has very important and positive aspects to it."

Ostrander doesn't want to be tied to any unnecessary continuity from the Gold Key/Western run of *Magnus*, but he's drawing on their spirit. "I want to make *Magnus* a book for the '90s, and I want to keep faith with the old stuff in that I keep up a certain continuity with the characters," he explains. Whatever else those old stories were, they were also a warning against overdependence on technology.

"It's a theme in my first issue: North Am isn't able to defend itself. It needs Magnus, and Magnus isn't there. They depended on Magnus too much and they depended on technology too much, and they can't defend themselves. North Am was probably Earth's economic powerhouse, so its loss will have reverberations. We're going to explore what happens all around the world. The old series showed different aspects of Earth, but we're going to do that to an even greater extent, including the political, social and economic aspects. Some nations may try to make peace with the Malevs, some people may join together against the Malevs. We plan for the Malev storyline to run for at least three years. We're talking about a *major* world war."

The whole Malev War serves as a backdrop for shorter stories that will explore Magnus' world. Ostrander says that while the old series consisted of robots going bad and Magnus chopping them up, the Malev War will allow for a greater variety of stories for both Magnus and Rai.

"Rai is somewhat different," he says. "The new Rai actually has the ability to end the war—if he can actually get close enough to the Malev Emperor. He has the blood of the character Bloodshot coursing through his veins, which means he can take over machines. If he can get close enough to the Malev Emperor, he can seize control and force the Emperor to do what he says, which would end the war."

Since both *Magnus* and *Rai* are set in the Valiant future, stories, events and characters will interact, but the writer emphasizes that the titles can be enjoyed independently. "It won't be absolutely necessary to read both, but if you like one of them, you're bound to like the other," he says. "Supporting cast members will drift back and forth between the two books all the time. We're going to create new characters and new concepts in both books; we may do mini-series or even spinoff series from them as well."

Other comics companies have set stories in the far-off future; most notably DC's *Legion of Super-Heroes* and Marvel's new *2099* titles, but Ostrander believes Valiant's future Universe is different.

"I'm writing both books, so that gives them a little more continuity," he declares. "I've also given a lot of thought to the world itself. For instance, we were just talking about the continent-wide city of North Am. Does that mean every inch of North America

Selected Magnus and Rai & the Future Force Art Courtesy Voyager Communications Inc.

Art Scan Lee Cuba-Kelley Jones

Ostrander says the Malev storyline is expected to continue for three years. However, *he* doesn't want to be the one who tells Rai.

"I love to tell stories," enthuses Ostrander. "The fact that people pay me to tell stories is an honor."

Magnus, Robot Fighter #1, Predator #1 & Predator versus the A.V.H. #1 © 1993 Valiant. Predator Vs. Magnus Robot Fighter #1 © 1993 Valiant & Copyright 1993 Western Publishing Co., Inc. & Valiant. Future Force #1 © 1993 Valiant. Hawkworld #1 © 1993 DC Comics Inc.

Hawkworld Art: Timothy Truman. Hawkworld #1 © 1993 DC Comics Inc.

"Things were left hanging enough [in the final *Hawkworld*] so that people are going to want answers," Ostrander says.

Ostrander seldom has to worry about his books contradicting events in the present-day Valiant comics, but he isn't operating totally on his own. He has had some influence on other Valiant comics because of his writing experience.

I learned that Barry Windsor-Smith was working with the young artists at Valiant, actually coaching them on an individual basis. I thought that if Barry was doing that with the artists, I should be very willing to help young writers," he says. "So far, I've done my own seminars at Valiant, both on and off comics. Valiant has been so generous with the seminars that they're always talking about doing one at a convention this summer, where I would sit in the room and talk to a bunch of young writers about comics writing."

The opportunity to teach was an irresistible one. "I'm really excited. It's something that I've *always* wanted to do. Where does a young writer go to learn how to do it, what's important about writing? I wanted to be able to do that. I volunteered myself. Maurice Fontenot, who is writing *Harbinger*, has talked out ideas with me for that book, exploring possibilities and ways to affect what he wants to do. I think I'm having some influence on the rest of the Valiant Universe in terms of talking with some of the in-house writers and trying to help them develop."

Detailing a crash course in comics scripting, he explains that his approach to writing is encapsulated in three basic rules—honesty, clarity and simplicity—that he jokingly refers to as the "Ostrander Manifesto."

"The terms sound simple and easy, but they're really not," says Ostrander. "You write honestly what you feel, what you know, and you know more than you think you know.

"Clarity means that the reader has to stop and figure out what we are, or who that character was when you've lost them—you don't ever want to make the reader have to stop and figure things out because you aren't clear about what's happening. The action must be clear, the story must be clear, the characters must be clear. They don't have to be simple-minded—to develop a character who's multi-layered, you do it one step at a time. Show one aspect at a time because a person has many different aspects. You can show them doing one thing on one page, and something totally different on the next. At any given moment, we can go from pleasant to snarling in two seconds flat—why can't the characters? They can. If you do it *one step at a time*. If you do them in rapid succession, it looks multi-layered, and that's clarity.

"Simplicity is the old KISS rule—Keep It Simple, Stupid, and it usually works. The simplest answer is usually

Art: Sean Chen/Colors: Kathryn Bolinger

Magnus Robot Fighter #1 © 1993 Valiant. Predator Vs. Magnus Robot Fighter #1 © 1993 Valiant & Copyright 1993 Western Publishing Co., Inc. & Valiant. Future Force #1 © 1993 Valiant.

Writing both *Magnus* and *Future Force* allows for better continuity, but Ostrander says readers don't have to pick up both.

the most correct. Do they do this because they really love this girl? 'Well, they may *think* they love this girl, but in reality, they're in love with their mother'—no, no, no! They're in love with the girl, we can deal with that. He may be in love with his mother, too, and that may influence it, but keep it simple, stupid!"

Ostrander began his comics career writing for First Comics, where he co-created *Grimjack*, then headed for DC, for whom he wrote almost exclusively on such series as *Firestorm*, *Manhunter* (with wife Kim Yale), *Suicide Squad*, *Hawkworld* and mini-series like the acclaimed *Gotham Nights* and *Legends*. His work at Valiant doesn't mean he's leaving DC behind, however. In addition to scripting the new *Spectre* monthly, the upcoming *Hawkman* and *Gotham Nights II*, Ostrander (who discussed past projects in CS #2) hints that he may even be doing a future project for Marvel.

Valiant has been one of comics' biggest success stories in recent years, and Ostrander attributes that to good storytelling. "Storytelling is a combination of the writer and the artist working together, bringing in the best available production values," he says. "It's a good, attractive package. The characters are accessible, and there are good stories being told, and I think that's what's building it. Somebody once said that the art will attract the reader for three to five issues; after that, the *writing* has to hold them. That's what's happening with Valiant. The writing and the art have been consistent.

"I don't know if Valiant is doing anything different than the other companies—in many cases, I just think they're doing it better," he remarks.

"They're taking good, solid characters—Solar and Magnus existed elsewhere, but they made them the cornerstones of the Valiant Universe. They aren't tied down by the years of continuity that Marvel has, but they take their characters seriously enough that you don't feel stupid reading them.

"The myth of comics is very important, and I talk about that in my writing courses. If you go up to someone on the street, they can probably tell you where Clark Kent works, but can't name their congressman. There's something mythic about the superhero, and Valiant taps into that."

Ostrander remains excited about his monthly DC writing on *The Spectre* and *Hawkman* (following his explosive finish to the *Hawkworld* series).

"The Spectre is going to Hell," he announces. "He needs information from someone who has just died, and the Spectre has to go to Hell to get it. After that, the Spectre is challenged to prevent crimes and reduce violence, instead of simply punishing criminals. Madame Xanadu appears in issue #7 with a vengeance—we're revealing more about her background and her relationship with the Spectre. Our subplots are going to be coming together, leading to a grand climax in issues #11-#12."

Ostrander says he has always been fascinated by the Spectre. "It's a great concept and a great-looking character, but it has never worked quite right," he notes. "When the character became available and [artist] Tom Mandrake was also available, we went after it. I explained to them how the character works. Basically, the Spectre is Jim Corrigan, and Jim Corrigan is dead. That's the given. What the Spectre does is based on who Corrigan was when he was alive. All of his parameters are intimately tied to who Corrigan was. He has unlimited power, but he still has much of the same perspective that he had when he was alive—and he wasn't that nice of a person."

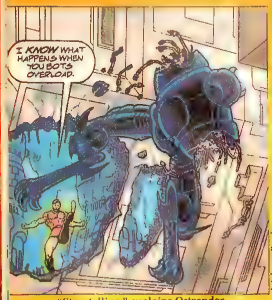
In helming *Magnus, Robot Fighter* and *Rai and the Future Force*, the writer says, "Basically, they turned the future of the Valiant Universe over to me."

The new *Hawkman* will begin this fall, following some pivotal events in the final issue of *Hawkworld*. "There's a very good reason for Hawkman's new costume—I'm not even guaranteeing that it's Katar Hol behind the mask. When Hawkman finally shows up, the first question everyone has is, 'Who is he?' And the second question will be, 'Where is Hawkwoman? *Is* there a Hawkwoman?' "

Changes were the result of Ostrander's desire to shake things up. "I'm very proud of the run we had on *Hawkworld*, but it was time to change the pace and shift gears. That's what we've done. Things were left hanging enough so that people are really going to want answers, and the new *Hawkman* will be more involved in the DC Universe here—Green Lantern guest stars in issue #2."

The four-issue *Gotham Nights* won acclaim from fans and critics alike, in its portrayal of ordinary people who just happen to live in the Batman's

(continued on page 66)



"Storytelling," explains Ostrander, "is a combination of the writer and artist working together."

For centuries, the myth of the eternal warrior has been a part of popular culture. Whether it's the Babylonian hero Gilgamesh, Michael Moorcock's Eternal Champion series or the 1986 film *Highlander*, there's something about the idea of a man battling through the centuries that captures the imagination.

The newest immortal on the block is Continüm Comics' *The Dark*. Created by writer/publisher Joe Naftali, the character began as the main feature in the short-lived black-and-white book *Continüm Presents* before graduating to his own title in 1990.

According to editor-in-chief Jeff Allgeier, "*The Dark* is the story of Alan McGroth, a human being who was born in 1172 A.D. and has lived as a warrior for 800 years. He was a warrior in World War II, in Vietnam, all the way back through the Middle Ages, the Crusades. He has been a mercenary or a warrior his entire life.

"Our book is rooted in the present, so while we'll have flashbacks and flash-forwards, what we're showing is the growth and development of an 800-year-old warrior who's coming to terms with living in the 20th century.

"This is a point in time where after years of living for the excitement of battle, McGroth is starting to become more and more disaffected with warfare. As it has moved from hand-to-hand combat to mass destruction, he has identified a new battlefield, which is battling things like organized crime, drugs and a type of corruption that makes living in the modern world dangerous. Taking on the identity of The Dark is partially his developing as a character, so that he decides, 'I'm a warrior, I'll always be a warrior, but there's a different battlefield out there now, and a different enemy.'

Dark Cover Art: George Perez/Color: Tom Vincent

Another immortal warrior wanders into comic-book action.

TALES OF THE DARK KIND

"At the same time, The Dark is being stalked by forces from the future, forces from the present and, to a certain extent, forces from the past. Crippled by loss of memory, [after surviving an attack in the first issue], he doesn't even realize some of the threats out there," explains Allgeier.

The Dark began life several years ago, during Naftali's role-playing days. "When I was young, playing *Villains and Vigilantes*," he relates, "I came up with a character very similar to The Dark called The Shadow, not knowing about the great radio series or the comic.

By JOE NAZZARO

"I wanted to get him out as a comic-book character, so I tried to get a series going with every single company, but I couldn't get anybody to pick me up. I later organized a *Dungeons & Dragons* convention, rented out a whole hotel floor and met a lot of writers and artists who came. Three of us got together and said, 'OK, let's form a company. We'll publish an anthology series, and The Dark will be the main feature of every issue.' I became the company's head, and these guys filled in to do the art and writing.

"We published three black-and-white books called *Continüm Presents*, two of which featured Dark stories. The first was drawn by Scott Hanna, who's now a DC inker, and the response was so favorable that we started doing the color Dark series."

One of the biggest differences between The Dark and his superhero compatriots is that other than his natural regenerative abilities, he has *no* real powers. "Alan McGroth is a perfect human being," says Naftali. "If you had a large percentage of your brain capacity to be used, that would be the ability. He can't fly, he doesn't have X-ray vision and he can't lift a car, but

due to his combat training and enhanced regenerative abilities, his skills are so far beyond anyone else's. His reflexes are trigger-quick. If you spend 15 years learning how to use a gun, you're going to be perfect at it. Well, imagine that over the course of 800 years!"

"He's also very strong after swinging a sword around for all that time."

Art: Mark Bright/Robert Campanella

Facing threats from the past, present and future, Alan McGroth fights as *The Dark*, for a life he doesn't quite remember and a world that doesn't fully accept him.

adds Allgeier. "He possesses more than natural strength, but we're not talking about busting through walls type of strength. This is definitely a man, with a man's foibles and flaws. Physically, he's a perfect human being, but he's not always right. He can make mistakes and does."

In addition to Alan McGroth, *The Dark* features a large cast of supporting characters, most of whom have already been introduced in the first few issues. They include: Geoffrey Stockton, the leader of New York's underworld and McGroth's nemesis in the 20th century; April Coster and Jennifer McDonnell, McGroth's love interests, one of whom is destined for a very nasty accident; Whani, McGroth's servant and companion; Davidson and Grey, who purport to be CIA agents, but have their own reasons for wanting to track down McGroth; Queen Rune, McGroth's future wife, and Winchester, her sidekick. The two have led a band of soldiers back from the 25th century to kill McGroth and avert a possible galactic war. Their assassination attempt in issue #1 fails, leaving McGroth with no memory and themselves stranded in the 20th century.

While Naftali has major plans for each of his characters, he hesitates to reveal them just yet. "Different people become major at different points." Allgeier explains. "We already have the storylines plotted to about issue #25, and they are *very* complex. If some small thing happens in issue #3, it will have ramifications in #16, and we're setting things up that way, because one of the things we hate is loose ends. We're trying to info-dump as much as possible without hitting people over the head with it."

In order to keep track of the many twists and turns in the book, *The Dark*'s creative team has mapped out every plot thread in great detail. "I'm an organizational person," Allgeier declares, "and we have charts that keep track of all our characters, our sub-plots and the frequency with which they appear. We're keeping track of all of that, because that's what makes our text rich and the book satisfying.

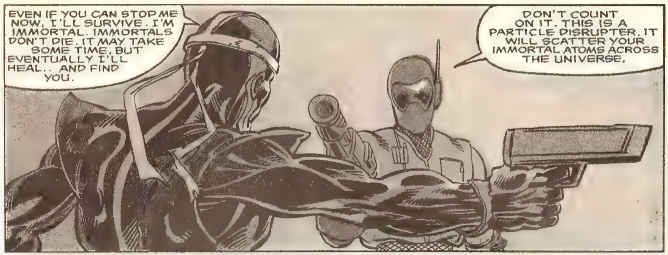
"We are working so far in advance now—we're going monthly in April, reprinting #1 with a new coloring job, new scripting and a new cover, while #5 is already being worked on. Meanwhile, we're already working on #6-#10, so we have the kind of lead time where we can maintain a regular schedule and still be perfectionists."

"I think we've proven to people that *The Dark* and Continüm are not going away," says Naftali. "We may have been slow in the past, but we're here now. We have a permanent letterer, a permanent colorist, Jerry Acerno is the permanent inker, Todd Lidstone, who did assists for Mark Bright, is now our regular penciller. Jeff and I are both very quick, productive writers, and we're working ahead of ourselves writing future issues. That way, if we meet a talented artist, we can say to them, 'Here, draw issue #12, and give it to us in four months.' "

"We feel that adherence to deadlines is *very* important," adds Allgeier, "because people do expect to see you every month; to become, if you'll forgive a horrible pun, a part of their continuum. People look forward to a comic month after month, and our biggest struggle over the last two years has been to get ourselves to the point where we can put out a monthly book with the kind of quality in script and art that we want to produce."

One policy the company plans to continue is lining up some of the industry's hottest talents to work on different issues of *The Dark*. Previous contributors have included Mark (*Green Lantern*) Bright, Larry (*X-Factor*) Stroman and George Perez, who pencilled the cover for *The Dark* #4, inked one of the book's key flashbacks and has recently signed on as permanent cover artist.

The idea for approaching different artists to toil on *The Dark* belongs to


EVEN IF YOU CAN STOP ME NOW, I'LL SURVIVE. I'M IMMORTAL. IMMORTALS DON'T DIE, IT MAY TAKE SOME TIME, BUT EVENTUALLY I'LL HEAL... AND FIND YOU.
DON'T COUNT ON IT. THIS IS A PARTICLE DISRUPTER. IT WILL SCATTER YOUR IMMORTAL ATOMS ACROSS THE UNIVERSE.

Art: Mark Bright/Dan Parsons

All Dark Art: Courtesy Continuum Comics

"He is immortal, but he's *not* Superman," says editor Jeff Allgeier. "If he gets shot, he feels it."

Naftali. "I go after artists that I like," he states simply, "and I knew Larry Stroman for a while before I asked him to do the issue. We wanted to give Mark Bright a break, and I really liked the work that Larry did. I thought Rick Bryant complemented him very well on the inking, and Tom Vincent did a good job on the coloring.

"Art to me is something that I won't publish if I'm not satisfied with it. I see some artists and I say, 'Why is this guy published by Marvel, and I get submissions that are better than his work?' "

Having a slate of new artists to choose from has another benefit, according to Allgeier. "It gives us a chance to do things that enrich the book as a whole. It helps if we have an epilogue that has a specific mood as in issue #2, which takes place in a sleazy bar called The Dark Ages, which we actually named to drive a historian friend of mine crazy. Her thing is the early Middle Ages, and she hates when people call it The Dark Ages.

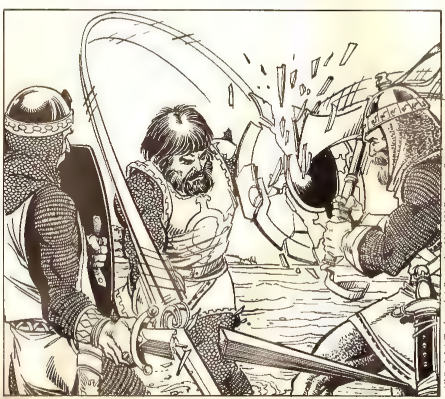
"That is a very gritty, working-class, sleazy bar, where the dog soldiers from the future were hanging out and getting boozed up, so we used [artist] Mic Duggan for that. His style is drastically different from the rest of the book, but it suited the characters. At the same time, by having Jerry Acerno as our regular inker, we have an overriding continuity."

While Naftali admits to being influenced by some of the other immortal characters in popular culture, he's quick to point out that *The Dark* is purely his own creation. "I'm very influenced by gothic, powerful stories; Michael Moorcock, Jim Starlin's *Dreadstar*, Camelot. Some people say this is an imitation of *Highlander*, and I say that it's *not*. I didn't see *Highlander* until *The Dark* was already in existence. I had already written much of his plotline and his entire history before I saw *Highlander* for the first time."

Because of the character's historical origins, Allgeier feels there are countless opportunities for *Dark* spinoff series, each of which could take place in a different era. "That's something we're anticipating, doing one-shots like *Tales From The Dark*. As a mercenary, he was involved in most of the major confrontations of Western European history since the 12th century. Both Joseph and I have a

Suffering amnesia, the Dark recalls France, summer 1193. He wonders if he's reliving his own past or just having a nightmare.

Art: Mark Bright/George Perez



All Dark Art: Trademark & Copyright 1991, 1992 Continuum Comics

AND OVER THE COURSE OF THE NEXT FEW HOURS, I WANT TELL HIS OLD FRIEND EVERYTHING HE KNOWS ABOUT THE MAN NAMED ALAN MCGROTH, AKA THE DARK.

Art: Mark Bright/Todd Latrone/Jerry Acierno

"Alan McGroth is a perfect human being," explains creator Joe Naftali. Over 800 years, a man can learn a lot.

history background—I'm a medieval historian, and he's a classics major at New York University—and we think this would be an opportunity to do a book that was educational as well."

"I just want to make a quick note," Naftali interjects. "Everything that you see in *The Dark* is authentic. I went to great lengths to be sure the armor that's worn, the weapons that were used, *everything* is authentic. I never want a person to write in and say, 'Wait a minute, that's not the right thing!' because I used to do that. I used to remember when a writer would screw up, and I didn't like it."

Historical accuracy notwithstanding, *The Dark*'s creative team also plans to explore the ramifications of immortality. One of the first discoveries the reader will make, Allgeier promises, is that immortality doesn't mean invulnerability. "McGroth can survive certain types of wounds, but we've never established whether he can survive *anything*. If we dropped him into a bucket of molten metal, I'm not quite sure what would happen.

"The fact is, the character is battle-worthy enough that he has managed to avoid having any major limbs severed so far, but that doesn't mean it won't happen in the future. Therein lies part of the suspense. He is immortal, but he's *not* Superman. He won't intentionally take a head shot from a high-powered rifle, because we don't know what will happen. Maybe he'll spend 50 years as a drooling idiot until his brain regenerates. In issue #1, he does take a couple of head shots, but they land on his armored headpiece, so he gets concussed."

"His whole outfit is intended to protect him," offers Naftali. "The bands are Kevlar, the headpiece is Kevlar; the whole suit is designed for protection, because he can't stop everything."

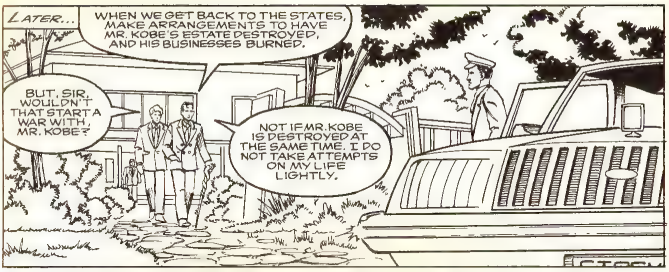
"And he doesn't want to get stabbed either," continues Allgeier, "because it *hurts*! It feels the same as anybody else who gets a knife stuck in him. If he gets shot, he feels it; it's not something he simply shrugs off, and as a warrior, he knows if he takes a couple of 50-millimeter machine gun bullets through the chest, it will heal eventually—but it's still going to hurt for a long time!"

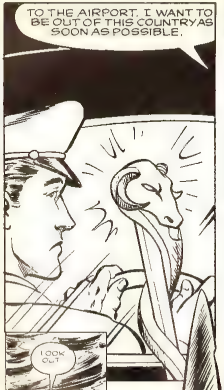
Besides *The Dark*, Continüm is also publishing a superhero parody title, *Mighty Mites*, as a monthly, full-color release. Lampooning everyone from Batman to Daredevil, *Mites* takes a savage look at long-established comic book traditions. "We're lambasting not only the business, but life in general," says

MCGROTH TOOK THE CAMERA FROM ME. I COULDN'T STOP HIM.
WHAT DO YOU MEAN YOU COULDN'T STOP HIM?
HE DUSTED ME.
WHAT? YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO BE THE BEST!
HE LIFTED ME UP OFF MY FEET WITH ONE FREAKING ARM!

Art: Mark Bright/Robert Campanella

Agent Davidson may work for the C.I.A., but he's after the Dark for his own reasons. Helping him is Michael Grey, who has met his match in the Dark.


LATER...
WHEN WE GET BACK TO THE STATES, MAKE ARRANGEMENTS TO HAVE MR. KOBE'S ESTATE DESTROYED, AND HIS BUSINESSES BURNED.
BUT, SIR, WOULDN'T THAT START A WAR WITH MR. KOBE?
NOT IF MR. KOBE IS DESTROYED AT THE SAME TIME. I DO NOT TAKE ATTEMPTS ON MY LIFE LIGHTLY.



Art: Mark Bright/Todd Ludasse/Jerry Acerno

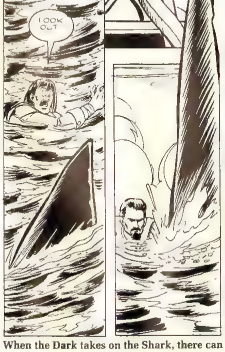
Geoffrey Stockton is McGroth's main foe. An imposing business force in the world above, he leads New York's underworld.

Allgeier. "Issue #3 for example, is *The Dead Show*, in which *everyone* dies. The promotional copy is, 'In issue #3, they all die. Why? Because death sells! In issue #4, they come back, because resurrection sells even better!' We think it's a really fun book."

With *The Dark* now available to a new and potentially larger readership, the publishers of Continüm Comics hope that fans will give the book a try. "As a one-time fan," says Joe Naftali, "I remember what I wanted and missed except for a few rich books that I could find, and it's that richness I'm trying to put into this series. From the response we've gotten, I think we have it: rich, interwoven, complex plots, good art, name talents and we won't sacrifice our integrity. You won't catch us making mistakes, and if you do, we want to hear about it."

"What we've tried to create is a tale of intrigue, action and excitement that's a cut above anything else that's out there," promises Jeff Allgeier. "It's a book to pick up and look at, because instead of weaving a cheap cotton rug, we've tried to weave a rich tapestry. If people stay with us, they'll be glad they did, because we've set up a story that's very rich, that needs a number of issues to unfold.

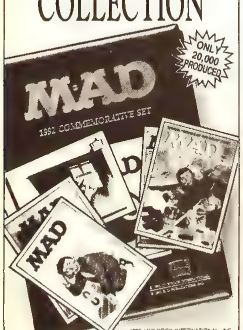
"This is a man who has some special abilities, but is also trying to make his way through life the way we all are. I guess what I'm trying to say is it's a hell of an exciting book."



Art: Mark Bright/Jerry Acerno

When the Dark takes on the Shark, there can only be *one* outcome—Sushi.

A WORTHLESS COLLECTION



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Black

(continued from page 11)

Cunningham's talents were taxed during the first series of *The Men In Black*. After getting the contract, he wrote three issues without knowing who the artist would be. That forced him to be extremely meticulous in describing the action. Artist Sandy Carruthers was assigned the job and Cunningham says he has done a capable job with *The Men In Black*.

"He's really good at utilizing the ideas I present him," says Cunningham. "I can look at a finished page and look at the script page and say, 'Yeah, this is the thing I was looking for.'"

WE'RE NOT THE SYSTEM. WE'RE OVER IT. ABOVE IT. BEYOND IT!
WE'RE "THEM." WE'RE "THEY." WE'RE THE MEN IN BLACK.
THIS GUY SURE KNOWS HOW TO FEED YOU A LINE. I'LL GIVE HIM THAT MUCH.

When the Men in Black concept was introduced to Cunningham, "it jumped right out. It seemed to be ripe with possibility."

Most important when working with an artist is realizing a comic is a collaboration, he notes. Neither the writer or artist likes to have ideas squelched entirely by his partner. As a writer, Cunningham tries to include as much description as possible to get his ideas across and hopes the artist has a good grasp on the story.

"Leonard Kirk, when I worked with him on *Eliminator*, would come up with things that I hadn't even thought of, and they worked great," Cunningham explains. "That's when it's at its best—when you're on the same wavelength but you still bring your own outlook. When it's at its worst, you don't seem to come together at all."

What *The Men In Black* will look like in the future depends on the casting whims of Columbia Pictures. Cunningham would like to be involved as a consultant, but harbors no great hopes that this will be the case.

"Certainly, whatever winds up on the screen will somehow be derived from what I did," Lowell Cunningham says. "There are sure to be changes, but I'm hoping what ends up on the screen as *The Men in Black* is essentially recognizable as what I started." CB

Larkin

(continued from page 45)

in my mother's house, there are some original *Doc Savage* magazines," he laughs. "My father was an avid reader during WW II and I picked it up in '64, when I was in ninth or tenth grade."

Larkin attended Farmingdale College on Long Island, but studied mostly mechanicals, paste-up and design, adding that he's basically self-taught in illustration. "When I got out of Farmingdale, I worked for an advertising agency and pushed toward the illustration end of the business, where I was doing a lot of pen and ink for black-and-white ads. Then, I ended up working for a surgeon for six years—while I was still freelancing for Marvel and Bantam—and did a lot of interior figure drawings. It was all anatomy stuff—blood, bones, you name it."

Before *Doc Savage*, Larkin received combat experience working for Marvel Comics in the late '70s. There were numerous paintings for trade paperback collections of *The Amazing Spider-Man* and *The Incredible Hulk*, and several paintings for Pocket Books' Marvel Novel Series, featuring characters such as Iron Man, Doctor Strange, Captain America and the X-Men.

"I think the first cover I did for Marvel was *The Haunt of Horror*, and that was sometime back in the '70s. All through the '70s, I did a lot of the black-and-white magazine covers. I did the cover to *The Dazzler* #1, a downsize regular comic, but most were the black-and-whites."

From 1980 through 1987, Larkin also crafted numerous black-and-white paintings for network ads in *TV Guide*. "I did *a lot* of stuff for ABC, sometimes three to four b&w paintings *a week*, and that really took away from my color work. I did so many that I can't remember them all. I handled some of *The Tall Guy* ads, and all of the *Blue Thunder* ads. Every week Blue Thunder [the helicopter] was being chased by this or that, and they were always blowing up something. It got so confusing, I didn't know what the hell I was doing in those days."

There was also a brief stint on Don Pendleton's *Executioner* paperbacks "way back when." Larkin's currently illustrating Bantam's *Eagle Force* series. Still, he looks back fondly on his tenure as the Artist of Bronze. He also sees a bright future for Doc Savage and his celebrated return to new adventures after 41 years.

"I think Doc will keep on going, especially with the new writer [CS contributor/novelist Will Murray]. I just hope I can do something with the Doc Savage series again someday," Bob Larkin says, "because I would like to try something different." CB

THE FATHER OF ZIGGY...

By EDWARD J. HOHMAN

Tom Wilson addresses the simple popularity of his bewildered star of comic strips & greeting cards.

Tom Wilson is one of those unique individuals who manages to combine creative and artistic talents with administrative and supervisory skills that most artists lack. It didn't take long for management to discover this when they hired Wilson some 37 years ago at American Greetings in Cleveland, Ohio.

Rising quickly from his art staff job, Wilson was promoted to Assistant Art Director, then Art Director, Assistant Vice-President and finally, Art Director and Vice-President of the Creative Division. Recently retired from this last position, Wilson says, "Retirement isn't a word I can relate to. All it really means, in this case, is that I can now concentrate *all* of my energy and creative efforts on Ziggy."

While he's no longer involved in other projects at American Greetings, Wilson does maintain an office there. He reports several days a week, and says, "Since I live in Cleveland, there are so many Ziggy cards and promotional products that need constant reviewing, it just seems natural that I make myself available."

The cartoonist has indeed come a long way. Recalling the days when he often hitchhiked from the Art Institute of Pittsburgh to his home in Uniontown, Pennsylvania, Wilson notes, "The trip was often made out of necessity. Money was scarce, and I found that if I wanted to eat well, home was the place to go." Wilson couldn't afford to continue his art studies, even though he did earn additional money working for the

Hagan Ice Cream Company. He was forced to return to Uniontown, where he found employment in the local newspaper's advertising department.

While he enjoyed working as an artist on the newspaper staff, it was somewhat of a "stop-gap" situation, according to Wilson. "I was waiting to be drafted, and fortunately, when this finally occurred, the Korean War was drawing to a close. Thanks to the G.I. Bill of Rights, I was able to return to school. I was in the service for two years, and happened to be discharged on a Friday. The following Monday, I was back attending classes at the Art Institute of Pittsburgh."

Although he had completed the course at the Art Institute, some of Wilson's artwork still adorned the walls after he left. A visiting entourage of executives from American Greetings saw his work, and were immediately impressed. Soon, Wilson was on his way to Cleveland, Ohio, and to a successful experience that he never dreamed was possible during the lean years in Uniontown.

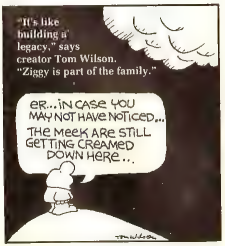
Much as he enjoyed his work at American Greetings, Wilson felt an inner urge to "do something with my own hands." At home, during his evenings away from the office, Wilson worked on cartoons, experimenting with different characters and concepts, concentrating heavily on humorous situations. It was during one of these creative sessions that "Ziggy" came into being.

"My favorite comedy stars in the movies were Laurel and Hardy," notes Wilson. "I just loved it when, after Stan Laurel had done something stupid, Oliver Hardy would look out at the audience with that bewildered look on his face." Wilson felt this same approach might work well in a comic strip. "The reader always seems to play a voyeur role in looking at a strip, and I just figured that if I felt involved when Hardy looked out on the audience, perhaps newspaper readers would have a similar reaction."

Photo: Courtesy Tom Wilson Jr.

Wilson was right. His ever-popular Ziggy looks out on an audience from 500 newspapers, bringing this same interchange to the comic page. The feature has been syndicated for more than 20 years, and appears in 20 countries.

Behind the scenes of Ziggy's success lies the fact that initially, syndicate editors weren't too fond of the character. Says Wilson: "Somehow, they didn't like the format I had come up with. I depicted Ziggy as an elevator operator who made comments on the passing scene. In comic strip form, I had his elevator doors open and close, and used a lot of sight gags, which I've always been fond of."


"It's like building a legacy," says creator Tom Wilson. "Ziggy is part of the family."
ER...IN CASE YOU MAY NOT HAVE NOTICED... THE MEEK ARE STILL GETTING CREAMED DOWN HERE...
TOM WILSON

Undaunted by the "syndicate-snub," Wilson presented his Ziggy character on greeting cards and in books, through American Greetings. A book of Ziggy's antics, *When You're Not Around*, caught the eye of syndicate owner Jim Andrews, and convinced him to acquire distribution rights to Ziggy. "At first," says Wilson, "I thought it was a crank call when Andrews phoned me, but when he went on to say he wanted to add a panel cartoon to Garry Trudeau's *Doonesbury*, which he had acquired for his newly-formed Universal Press Syndicate, I was convinced." At last, Ziggy had found a home.

In reflecting on the initial introduction to his now vast audience of readers, Wilson says, "I've always felt that I just got awfully, awfully lucky." Mentioning that the field remains a competitive one, he adds that one also has to "stay lucky." Created in 1971, Ziggy had become one of the five most popular cartoon panels in the country by 1978. Wilson's "luck" continues.

Initially, Ziggy didn't speak, but syndicate editors soon had Wilson complying with their wishes. Ziggy now frequently verbalizes his thoughts, and appears in both strip and panel form in Sunday installments,

T.C. Art: Tom Wilson Jr. Copyright 1981 Universal Press Syndicate

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Menu
I'M SORRY, MONSIEUR, BUT THE CHATEAU DE PARIS DOES NOT "GIVE OUT" FREE STAR TREK III: SEARCH FOR SPOCK ACTION GLASSES!
CAD
WILSON

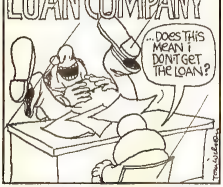
Tom Wilson Jr. discontinued his own strip *UG* when "the opportunity to work with my dad developed."

depending on the gag. Speaking of strips, and "sequential" gags, Wilson finds the evolving activity in the strip format an enjoyable process. "It's like developing a play. You know what the ending is going to be, so you have to build the story for that final scene."

The philosophy behind using a simplified drawing style on Ziggy is far from simple. In fact, explains Wilson, "It's a calculated thing. I've always favored simplicity. I love the Eskimo sculpture work, the simplification of things. In Ziggy's case, I wanted anybody and everybody to be able to relate to him. I felt that the fewer specifics I gave him, the broader that identification process would be. He can be almost anybody, depending on who the reader is."

While Ziggy's appearance in the 1982 TV special *Ziggy's Gift* was a labor of love, Wilson admits that the project (animated by *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*'s Richard Williams) was an all-consuming undertaking. "We won an Emmy for this Christmas special," says Wilson, "but it took over a year out of my life. I found that while I was pleased with its success, I didn't care to continue with such adaptations for TV. I felt as though eventually, someone else would have to take over the whole thing, and I didn't want that."

Ziggy's entrance into the greeting card field alone boosted sales to a staggering 55 million cards yearly. Wilson maintains a close, "hands-on" presence when it comes to the cards. "I rough out *all* of the cards," he says, "and I do the final art on many of them. If they require some special treatment, such as airbrushing, I leave that up to the art department." Staff writers often submit ideas which Wilson reviews. He then roughs out any that he feels have possibilities, holding these roughs for future consideration.



"One must know how to draw things properly, before simplifying or caricaturing them," the artist advises.

The character's popularity has spread to include an impressive list of products licensed by "Ziggy and Friends." The licensing company is owned by Wilson, as is the Ziggy copyright. Since 1980, sales of Ziggy products have doubled every year. There have been balloons, novelty telephones, ornaments, figurines, porcelain items, music boxes, school and stationery supplies, among other items.

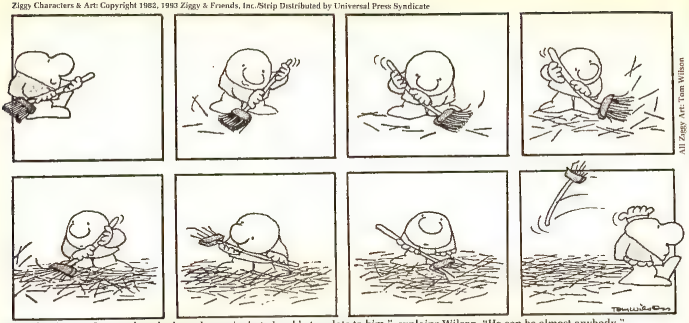
Andrews & McMeel, a Universal Press Syndicate Company, has published several Ziggy books. Wilson published his first Ziggy book, *Life is Just a Bunch of Ziggys*, in 1973, one year before the first Ziggy greeting cards. The 1989 offering, *Ziggy's Star Performances*, was a 152-page treasure trove of Ziggy's most popular panels from a 10-year period.

All Ziggy Art: Courtesy Tom Wilson/Edward J. Hohman

But it isn't all commercial concerns. Ziggy's well-known face has helped raise funds for the Leukemia Society of America, National Committee for World Food Day and the Salvation Army. Ziggy's association with the Suicide Prevention & Education Center in Louisville, Kentucky helped bring national recognition to the city, then ranked number two in the country for its teen suicide rate. The center's director, Patrick Mudd, believes Ziggy's participation helped promote a positive message. "Ziggy's appeal to young people, ages nine through 18, helped us by adding an upbeat note in our presentation to children," Mudd says.

Colonel Leon Ferraez, National Communications Director of the Salvation Army, best sums up Ziggy's appeal in these charitable efforts. Says Colonel Ferraez, "He's tenacious, and his motives are pure. That spirit is a joy to find, and Wilson and his people have it."

Ziggy Characters & Art: Copyright 1982, 1983 Ziggy & Friends, Inc./Strip Distributed by Universal Press Syndicate



All Ziggy Art: Tom Wilson

"In Ziggy's case, I wanted anybody and everybody to be able to relate to him," explains Wilson. "He can be almost anybody."

Tom Wilson's early ambition was to do illustrations. He admired the work of the artists whose paintings graced magazine covers, yet Wilson found success by *not* following his dream. "It's really odd," he muses. "It turns out that my success has evolved from something that I did more as a hobby, or to serve as a bit of a 'break' from my more serious drawing." Wilson still draws and paints whenever possible, and, like

other professional cartoonists, believes the more detailed, realistic work benefits the humorous drawing that he does every day. Says Wilson, "I always advise students who come to me to get as much formal art training as possible. Many youngsters think that comic art doesn't require the background that other forms of art demand, but they're wrong. To really do a good job, one must know how to draw things properly, before simplifying or caricaturing them."

Pondering new comic strips, Wilson finds them wanting. "Many of them lack the qualities that usually form the foundation for success. There are strips getting into print these days that don't have the necessary longevity built into them. Many seem to be the result of some editor taking them on because they seem to fit the pattern of what's currently being published."

Wilson blames editors for these decisions, mentioning that when Charles Schulz first submitted *Peanuts*, nearly everyone turned it down. Wilson has great admiration for Schulz and his work. "If you meet Schulz, you'll find him to be one of the most gentle human beings you could ever meet," says Wilson. "That strip is him...it comes from his insides, and it always has. That's something you can't fake. To have longevity, it has to come from the heart."

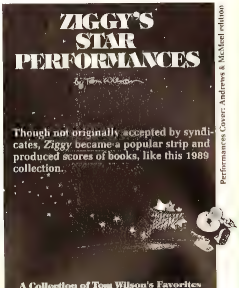
He also praises the uniqueness of Gary Larson's *Far Side*. He comments on the number of imitators Larson's panel has brought forth, and again refers to editors who "play it safe," assuming that the success of a similar feature is assured. "Seldom, if ever," says Wilson, "do such things as 'son of' or other take-offs meet with the public acclaim of the original."

During recent years, Wilson's son, Tom Jr., has been assisting him on Ziggy projects. The 34-year-old Cincinnati artist not only does the inking on many *Ziggy* panels, he keeps a steady stream of ideas and sketches flowing to his dad's office.

No stranger to cartooning, Tom Wilson Jr. had his own syndicated comic strip, *UG*, a "kid strip" which appeared in 80 papers before he discontinued it himself. "When the opportunity to work with my dad developed, I realized it was something I had always wanted to do," he says.

The younger Wilson's background includes three years of art studies at Miami University of Ohio, and a Fine Arts degree from Boston University. For a year-and-a-half, he worked on new product development for Amtoy Inc. He enjoys his frequent trips to his dad's office in Cleveland: "I particularly like being a part of the numerous concept sessions and meetings regarding new projects and packaging."

With son Tom collaborating on *Ziggy*, and even daughter Ava and Tom's wife Susan assisting (Susan does most of the Sunday color work), Tom Wilson just couldn't be happier.


ZIGGY'S STAR PERFORMANCES
Though not originally accepted by syndicates, Ziggy became a popular strip and produced scores of books, like this 1989 collection.
A Collection of Tom Wilson's Favorites From Ziggy's Past Ten Years . . .

Performances Covers: Andrews & McMeel edition

"It's like building a legacy that will live for years to come," he declares. "Ziggy is a part of the family, and the results of his popularity become part of my estate."

Tom Wilson Jr. feels certain that Ziggy will live on. Wondering if his son Miles would become involved some day, he notes, "That may very well happen. Miles is just five years old now, and he already draws a pretty good Ziggy!"

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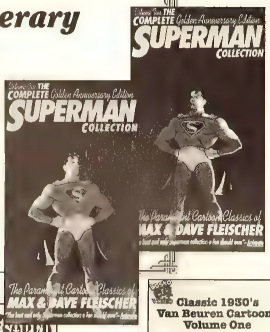

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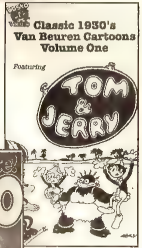

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SUPER SOLDIERS

New heroes enlist in the war that never ends.

Super Soldiers Art: Kaluta Carter/Red Kanies

By EDWARD GROSS

Art imitating life is certainly nothing new, and has often resulted in great success. Art imitating art, however, can be frustrating. Very frustrating.

Such is the case with Marvel U.K.'s *Super Soldiers*, which bears a striking similarity to the movie *Universal Soldier*.

"You could argue that they ripped off Captain America first," says Marvel U.K. editor and *Super Soldiers* creator Michael Bennent. "I've had this idea since I read *Daredevil: Born Again* by Frank Miller. They had this crazy guy, Nuke, an engineered super soldier fighting for his country without a second thought. He had these pills to take for various moods. Red was obviously for rage, the blue was tranquility. For every situation, he had to pop a pill. I thought it was a good concept to exploit further and I was surprised that Marvel never did. When I started here as an editor, I said, 'How about that now?' And that was the prime motivation. The concept for the comic started in spring '92 and we didn't see *Universal Soldier* until late summer."

Bennent remembers watching the film for the first time and being struck by a variety of similarities, including the fact that the hero was an Arnold Schwarzenegger-type accompanied by a sassy female sidekick, as well as the notion that the Universal Soldiers were dead and brought back from war to be revived as super warriors.

Sarah Wilde, Hauer's companion, is "mouthy and very sarcastic," explains Bennent. She uncovers the Super Soldiers experiment.

"That didn't help very much," he admits good-naturedly. "What the hell. It's the wacky world of comics, and we can get away with it. It's actually happening again. We're doing a comic called *Cyberspace 3000* and the writer was a bit inspired by *Star Trek*. So, he's writing away and creating all these characters and putting them on a ship that's more like a space station than a starship, though it does constantly move. There's a female captain, a black security chief, lots of aliens on the ship. As it so happens, this ship is designed like a dumbbell and one of the bells is severed by a wormhole. Now how about that? *Deep Space 3000*. This kind of thing happens *all* the time. That one I can redo because it hasn't been drawn yet, but *Super Soldiers* has been drawn for the past year so there was *nothing* I could do."

The premise of *Super Soldiers* is that a group of near-dead soldiers,

chosen from the Falklands war, were subjected to a variety of genetic and chemical experiments to alter their body metabolism in such a way as to create an elite military unit. Like Nuke from *Daredevil: Born Again*, these soldiers have their emotions, or moods, controlled by artificial substances which are built into their bodies for secretion whenever necessary.

"In the first issue," Bennent continues the scenario, "Hauer, our main character, tries to find out who he is and has flashbacks. He eventually remembers what happened to him and why he was in cryogenic sleep. It's all about this hush-up that Super Soldiers never happened in this country. They couldn't justify it to the public, so they created them for one purpose—war—but they all went crazy with this red mood syndrome and killed each other. Hauer and another guy were the only survivors and they were put on ice. They were too expensive to get rid of, so the idea was to keep them on ice until they could be used."

Naturally, things don't go according to plan when Hauer awakens and wants to know his identity and purpose. These are the questions, which are eventually answered throughout the first five issues of *Super Soldiers*.

All Super Soldiers, Wild Thing, Black Axe & Associated Characters ™ & Copyright 1993 Marvel Comics U.K.

Though similar to *Universal Soldier*, the book's concept appeared first but "you could argue that they ripped off Captain America," counters the writer.

Hauer's "benefactor," Sir Marcus Grantby Fox, a government minister responsible for the Super Soldiers program and currently head of the massive multi-national Empire Chemical Enterprises, sets out to stop the Super Soldiers from exposing the truth and ruining his career. To this end, Fox contacts the West Coast Avengers and asks for help. U.S. Agent responds.

"Issue #3 is basically a huge battle between U.S. Agent and Hauer," Bennent, a German-born former journalist, explains. "Then, Captain America shows up to pacify the situation. Captain America has discovered the truth and is going after them to save the day so no one gets hurt. The fifth book ends with the villain subdued—but not out of the picture. Captain America offers some advice on how he can help Hauer form a team of Super Soldiers under a U.K. government directive so they can be some kind of S.A.S. crack unit. That will be the next story arc."

"Captain America shows up to pacify the situation [between Hauer and U.S. Agent]," says Michael Bennent.

Wild Thing art Dale Mishler

Another Bennent creation, *Wild Thing* "is like a more sophisticated Marvel *What If...?*" Venom and Carnage appear within her Virtual Reality world.

Super Soldiers centers on a variety of characters who will take the adventure from one multistory arc to another. Joseph Hauer was in the British Army since his teenage years. When he suffered a brain injury during the Falklands War, he was deemed the perfect guinea pig for experimentation. A man without a family, his anonymity would prevent any "embarrassing" questions.

Joining Hauer is Sarah Wilde, a 28-year-old journalist described as a "mouthy and very sarcastic redhead." She acquires evidence that the U.K. government had been involved in genetic experimentation on humans in the '80s, and discovers Hauer, who's awakening from cryogenic sleep.

Alec Dalton is a survivor, presumed dead, of the last Super Soldier mission. In actuality, he was found in the jungle by Buddhist monks who nursed him back to health. Using Zen to control the chemicals secreted in his body, Dalton recalls his past life and teams up with Hauer.

The villains, beyond Sir Marcus Grantby Fox, consist of Gog and the Welsh Squaddies, a group of guards supposedly burned to death when their troop ship was bombed in the Falklands. Also used for experimentation, the Squaddies were controlled by cybernetic implants. Although massive in physique, they aren't very bright and are used primarily as mindless robots. One of them, Gog, manages to break free of his programming and joins the Super Soldiers.

Finally, there's Childs, another surviving Super Soldier but one quite insane both before and after the experimentation. Serving as Sir Marcus' bodyguard, Childs gets his greatest thrill from killing.

Bennent doesn't see the day when Hauer's humanity will come out completely, resulting in his being a man with incredible fighting abilities.

"Hauer's a very serious man," the writer says, "and he always will be. He'll never get over what he has been through. It's something he'll always be tormented by. There will always be a missing past. I think a person like that can never be entirely happy or cheerful. He's basically a miserable bastard, but all these colorful characters around him leave enough room to play with other people making fun of him without his realizing it."

Super mercenaries, characters in the mold of Deathstroke and the Punisher, have become comic book mainstays. Bennent attributes this to one simple factor: Escapism.

"It's an excuse for kids to lose themselves," he opines. "Kids like violence, that's undoubted. They like it if a hero is strong and can rip someone apart with his bare hands. But someone like the Punisher, I don't understand the appeal myself. In a sense, I know that this title ties in with the same audience—a tormented figure who has had a loss in his past and tries to make up for it—but I would never put the Punisher next to the Super Soldiers. I don't think they have a place next to each other. First of all, I think Hauer would rip Punisher to pieces, because it's against his nature to accept a vigilante. He's a patriot. He's working for an authorized legal organization. He's with the good guys, as it were. But the appeal is that it gives kids a good adrenaline rush, to see fit men fighting in an unusual manner. Things they can't do themselves. It's hard-hitting and gives more of a real feeling to it."

Which leads to the inevitable question: Do young readers need to be

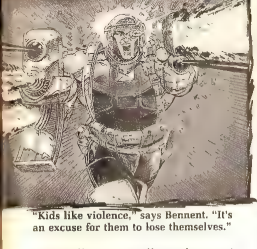
Black Axe art Liam Sharp

"There are always challenges in this world and," explains his creator, "you shouldn't give up, even though you're 10,000 years old [as Black Axe is]."

Art Andrew Copyrighted Ramos

plunged into a world of violence as a means of escapism?

"I don't think they need to, but if they *choose* to do so, what I'm trying to do is make sure they have fun while they're there," Bennent explains. "Most of the violence in *Super Soldiers* is funny. It's like a Schwarzenegger movie. It's over-the-top violence that you laugh at.



"Kids like violence," says Bennent. "It's an excuse for them to lose themselves."

Essentially, we're talking about quite stupid people. U.S. Agent is a stupid person. The way the fight starts, for instance, is that Hauer says, 'So, what do you want?' And U.S. Agent just smashes his shield in his face. What can you do? You can't say, 'Why did you do this?' You have to hit back or you'll get hit again. In a sense, Hauer is reluctant about violence. Only if necessary. Since he is this soldier, however, violence attracts him.

"But Hauer is a character who reacts to what's coming at him rather than going after it. He's not one of those people, like the Punisher, who goes after baddies, selects them and takes them out. Hauer is one who comes across it. In the second story arc, he'll be ordered to go somewhere but the violence will still be coming at him. He doesn't really know what to expect. The story structure will always be an initial drop somewhere and it will start happening *to* him. We find out *with* him what's going on."

Also debuting via Marvel U.K. at about the same time as *Super Soldiers* are two Bennent-created characters, *Black Axe* and *Wild Thing*. He serves as editor, not writer, on these titles.

"Black Axe," he explains, "is a 10,000-year-old warrior who has been fighting as a soldier in armies and was even a king at one point. He always seeks a challenge, he wants to be the best at everything. He has to find people who are the best at what they do and defeat them. As the title begins, he comes back after a term of 'celibacy' of being the best in our time line and finds another challenge in Death's Head, a cyborg assassin. They slug it out, and he is defeated and has to rethink his philosophy. There are always challenges in this world and you shouldn't give up because you're bored, even though you're 10,000 years old. Life is worth living and you take any challenge that comes. As a character, he ties in a lot with Japanese philosophies.

U.S. Agent's "hit first, ask questions later" response, though unwelcome by Hauer, is accepted. "Since he is this soldier, violence attracts him."

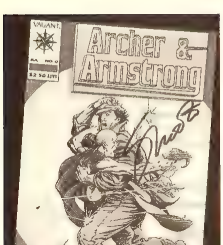
"Wild Thing was actually inspired by an episode of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, 'The Game.' I thought, 'Wouldn't it be great if you could have a comic character able to interact with a virtual reality game.' Then, you could have this future with these little arcades where people lie down and play virtual reality. Since it's the biggest thing in that timeline, there's a lot of illegal black marketing going on, and some of the programs are highly addictive and lethal. So, Wild Thing is recruited by the Arcades Organization that has tried to police illegal trading with VR games. If necessary, she jumps into a game to get the player out of it if he's trapped someplace.

"It's like a more sophisticated Marvel *What If...?*," smiles Bennent, "because you can use basically any Marvel character and do what you like with it. It starts off with Carnage and Venom in the first one, and Spider-Man in the second. In the first issue, there's this double-spread where a player in virtual reality stands triumphant on a rock and says, 'I did it. I beat them all.' And basically it's the whole of the Marvel superheroes dead all over the place. Captain America is pinned up by his shield, and Mr. Fantastic is stretched across three blocks. It's quite nice, because you can play with this without worrying about any continuity whatsoever."

Bennent's first job was as a journalist for a women's magazine where he covered popular culture. From there, he segued to Fleetway (*Judge Dredd*) and spent seven months heading up Dark Horse's British arm before joining Marvel. At the moment, he is overseeing the development of the creator-led Marvel U.K. imprint, Frontier Comics, which will debut four superhero titles soon. As if that isn't enough, he will continue to chronicle the adventures of *Super Soldiers*.

"If people pick up *Super Soldiers*," Michael Bennent offers, "I believe they'll like the characters. The series will also make them laugh on a sardonic level. It is an interesting read and quite intelligent. It's not going to be a gung-ho book that glorifies violence. It will have a point to make about its environment and motivations."

Art: Andrew Currie/Rod Ramos



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Ostrander

(continued from page 50)

hometown. Ostrander is very excited by the upcoming sequel, *Gotham Nights II*, and the artwork by Mary Mitchell and Dick Giordano.

"We're using a different set of characters, and the locale changes. The Batman is more involved in this story, simply because of the demands of the story itself," he says. "The main setting is a man-made amusement park island, the Charles Paris Amusement Park, located just off the coast of Gotham City. Mary has designed the entire island, and it's beautiful! It was designed around the turn of the century, and someone's trying to destroy it. It sets in motion all of the lives affected by the island."

Despite all of the series he has worked on over the years, Ostrander doesn't hesitate for a moment when asked which title he misses the most.

"*Grimjack*! There's not a month goes by that people don't ask me about *Grimjack*," he says of the futuristic warrior he created for First Comics. "I wish I could tell them I'm doing it tomorrow. Don't give up hope!"

Writing such a variety of titles means working with several artists in different ways.

"The artists over at Valiant tend to be a little bit newer, although they're developing very fast," he says. "At DC, I'm actually working with a husband-wife team, but on two different books. All of them are excellent artists with different abilities and different ways of telling stories.

"Tom Mandrake and I have worked together for five or six years, so it's almost like not working. I have a good idea of what he's going to do on *The Spectre*, but he does it better than I would have imagined. His wife, Jan Duursema, has redesigned the *Hawkman* costume; she's showing that she can do really cool superhero stuff!

"Over at Valiant, *Rai and the Future Force* is Sean Chen's first professional job. He's young and very new, doing some very interesting things. I think he's first-rate now, and he's going to grow to become a top talent; I can see him improving page by page. James Brock, with whom I'm doing *Magnus*, has been around longer, but he's still a relative newcomer compared to Tom and Jan. He's really clicking with each issue that comes out, and each issue gets stronger."

After a decade of comics scripting, John Ostrander says he still enjoys it all, because he loves storytelling.

"I love to be told a story, and I love to tell stories," he says. "The fact that people *pay me* to tell stories is an honor. That's something that I will never, ever take lightly."

Meteor

(continued from page 29)

of the world, ma! Meteor Man, get over here, Meteor Man!' and then he would go into Richard Burton in *Camelot*. He's always inspired me because as a standup comedian he was more character-driven, he would get into long monologues and different themes, so I really dug working with him."

Singer Luther Vandross, who's making his acting debut as a hired killer pursuing the superhero, was cast because the director likes his music and felt he could play a "smooth hit man" with panache. "He said he had never picked up a gun before in his life, but his scenes came out real well."

While currently preparing several projects—a new comedy for Eddie Murphy, another film about the life of Duke Ellington, and a TV variety show for Fox in which he will sing, dance and act out myriad characters—Townsend is still tending to the marketing and promotion of *Meteor Man*. This month, Marvel is publishing a *Meteor Man* comic book, in which, says the filmmaker, "Spider-Man will help our hero solve a crime." There will be six issues in all. "So, you see," Robert Townsend concludes, "Meteor Man has already been welcomed into the world of superheroes."

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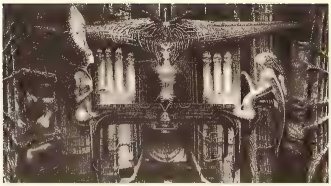

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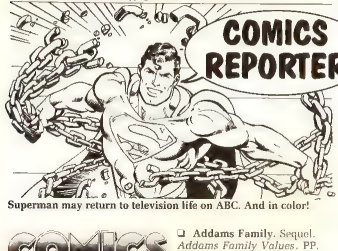

Superman may return to television life on ABC. And in color!

COMICS SCENE

All of these upcoming projects are live-action unless specified. These boxed are new or updated since last listing. **Not everything listed will ultimately ever be made.** Legend: S: script; D: director; P: producer; EP: executive producer; C: creator; AN: animated; LA: live-action; Syn. syndicated; HB: Hanna-Barbera; Nel: Netwas; MWS: Murakami Wolf Swanson; RB: Rankin Bass; WD: Disney; WB: Warner Bros.; PP: Paramount; U: Universal; DH: Dark Horse; L: Largo; Col: Columbia; Lor: Lorimar; Am: Amblin; FF: Funnybook Films; RS: Ruby-Spears. Attn. all pros: Info to be added to this list is cheerfully invited. Send to COMICS SCENE 475 Park Ave. South, 8th Flr., NY, NY 10016 (Info as of 2/9/93)

❑ **Addams Family.** Sequel. *Addams Family Values.* PP, AN series. Second season (8 episodes) OKed. ABC. HB.

Ace of the Newsreels. Film. S: Pam Hickey. Denays McCoy.

❑ **The Airtight Garage.** AN. P: Philippe Rivier. D: Moebius, Stephan Martiniere. S: Randy Lofficier.

Alias. Film. U. S: David S. Goyer. P: P. Lenkov, S. Daniel.

ALIENS vs. Predator. Film. DH/Fox.

The American. Film. DH/L.

Animaniacs. AN syn TV. WB/Am. Fall '93.

Annie. Film. *Annie & the Castle of Terror.* D: Lewis Gilbert. Rastar. Stage musical sequel. *Annie Warbucks.* Opens Broadway April. C: Charnin, Meehan, Strouse.

Archie. LA Film. S: N. & D. Ephron. DIC.

Baby Huey. AN short. U. S: Bill Kopp.

Bad Baby. AN TV. Imag.

Barbarella. LA film. Nel.

Barbie. Film. Abrams/Gentile Ent. & Mattel.

Batman. AN series. Fox.

The Black Cat. Film.

Blackhawk. Film. Am.

❑ **Blankman.** Film. C: Damon Wayans, Eric Gold. Sony.

Black Panther. Film. W/Wesley Snipes. D: John Singleton. P: Brad Weston, Bob Beitcher. Sony.

Blade. Film.

Blondie. Film. WB.

Bonkers D. Bobcat. Syn AN series. WD. Fall '93.

Boogiemanland. AN. Fox.

Bugs Bunny. *Termite Terrace.* LA/AN film. WB.

Casper. Film. Am. U.

Cobalt 60. AN film.

Concrete. Film. DH.

The Crow. Film. S: John Shirley. D: Alex Proyas. P: Ed Pressman. W/Brandon Lee.

Crusader Rabbit. New AN series. In development. Fox.

Cyberpunk. Film. S: Steve Roberts. D: Rene Manzor.

Dan Dare. TV series.

Daredevil. TV. Lor. Fox.

Deadworld. Film. S: Mark Pavia (D). Jack O'Donnell (P). Dementia Brothers Pictures.

Deathlok. Film.

Dennis the Menace. Film. P/S: John Hughes. D: Nick Castle. WB. Summer '93.

Dennis the Musical. S, E. Chambers. Music: Jeff Church. Lyrics: R. Enquist, Chambers.

❑ **Dinosaurs for Hire.** AN series. In development. Fox. Len Wein developing series bible.

Dr. Off. Film. Spoof. P: Tim Reid. Miramax.

Dr. Strange. Film. S/D: Wes Craven.

❑ **Doom's IV.** Film. P/S: Rob Liefeld. AM.

Duckman. AN. C: Everett Peck. Klasky Csupo.

Dudley Do-Right. Film. PP.

Elektra Assassin. Film. TriStar.

Elfquest. Film/TV. Abby Lou Prod. Freedom Distrib.

Evangeline. Film. FF.

❑ **Exosquad.** AN TV series. U. w/ Robby Benson.

Family Dog. AN series.

Fantastic Four. Film. Neue Constantin/Concorde. Lensing.

Fearless Fosdick. AN film.

Flaming Carrot. Film. Tundra/Limelight.

❑ **The Flintstones.** Film. Fred: John Goodman. U/Am. D: Brian Levant. S: Jim Jennewein, Tom

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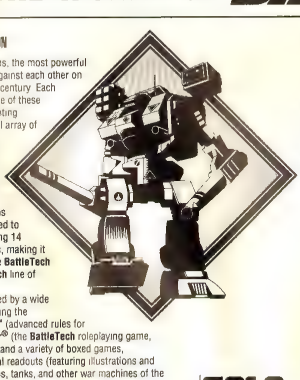

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Parker, Gary Ross. P: Bruce Cohen, Colin Wilson. Lensing to begin April.

G.I. Joe. Film. S/D: Sheldon Lettich. P: A&J Gentile, M. Abrams, G. Kirkwood. WB.

The Green Falcon. TV. Am. C: Mick Garris.

The Green Hornet. Film.

Hopalong Cassidy. Film. S: G. Popper, J. Rosenthal.

Iron Man. Film.

Jonny Quest. AN TV movie. *Jonny's Golden Quest*. HB.

Judge Dredd. Film.

Kings in Disguise. Film.

The Lion King. AN film. WD. Nov. '94.

Lone Wolf & Cub. Film. D: John Bruno. P: Ed Pressman. S: Bill Wisher.

Lucky Luke. TV series. Terence Hill. SB Comm.

Mai the Psychic Girl. Film.

Mandrake. Film.

The Mask. Film. New Line. S/D: Chuck Russell.

❏ **The Men in Black.** Film. Col. P: Walter Parkes, Laurie McDonald. (see article)

❏ **The Meteor Man.** Film. S/D: R. Townsend. (see article)

Mr. Magoo. Film. Am/WB.

Mr. X. Film. P: Jim Cash & Jack Epps Jr.

Nancy. Film. P: P. Muller.

Neil the Horse. AN/LA.

1-800-Monster. TV. USA. EP/S: Jonathan Betuel.

Pagemaster. AN film. Fox/HB. W/ Macaulay Culkin, Christopher Lloyd.

Paparazzi Samurai. AN TV series. P: DIC, Abrams/Gentile.

Peanuts. LA film. P/S: John Hughes. WB.

The Phantom. Film. PP. S: K. Shadie.

Plastic Man. Film. WB/Am. S: L. Wilson. D: B. Spicer.

Pocahontas. AN film. WD. Spring '94.

Prince Valiant. AN series. Family Chan. LA film. S: M. Beckner, N. Constantin Film. P: B. Eichinger, J. Gorman.

❏ **The Princess & the Goblin.** AN film. Due out spring.

Radio Boy. AN. RB.

Red Sonja. TV. Lancit.

Reid Fleming. Film. S: creator David Boswell. P: M. Weisman, J. Loeb II.

Richie Rich. Film. P: J. Silver, J. Davis. S: Neil Tolkin.

RoboCop 3. S: Frank Miller & Fred Dekker (D). Summer.

❏ **Roger Rabbit.** AN "Trail Mix Up." WD. Out spring.

Rupert the Bear. AN. Nel.

The Saint. Film. S: Terry Hayes. P: Robert Evans. PP.

Sandman. Film.

Scooby Doo. Film. WB.

Secret Agent X-9. AN film.

Sgt. Rock. Film. P: Joel Silver, Bob Zemeckis. WB.

❏ **The Shadow.** Film. S: David Koepp. P: Martin Bregman. D: Russell Mulcahy. Lenses soon.

❏ **Speed Racer.** AN TV series. Fred Wolf Films. Fall '93 bow. Film. D: Patrick Read Johnson. S: John Lawton. WB.

Spider-Man. Film. D: Jim Cameron.

❏ **Starwatcher.** AN film. P: Ridley Scott, Videosystem. D: Moebius, Pino van Lamsweerde. S: Moebius, J. Fryszman, J. L. Fromental. PP.

❏ **Superman.** TV series. ABC. Lorimar. TV movie pilot S: Deborah Joy Levine.

Super Mario Bros. LA film. S: Barry Morrow. D: Rocky Morton, Annabel Jankel. W/ Bob Hoskins. May '93 bow.

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. LA sequel. Out. AN series. CBS. Syn.

Terry & the Pirates. TV.

Time Cop. Film. D: Sam Raimi. DH/L.

Tom & Jerry. AN film. P/D: Phil Roman.

Trouble with Girls. Film. Fox/FF. S: W. Jacobs, G. Jones. P: M. Pepler, N. Tabachnick.

Valentina. TV series. Dementra Hampton. Reteitalia.

V for Vendetta. Film. WB.

Watchmen. Film.

We're Back. AN film. Am/U. Fall '93.

Why I Hate Saturn. TV.

Wild Cards. Film. Disney. S: George R.R. Martin. P: Michael Engelberg.

Wizard of Id. Film. Cinergi.

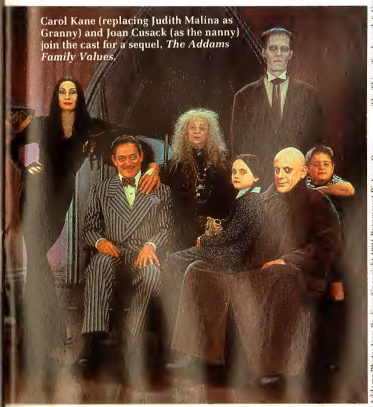
Wolff & Byrd. TV. Lorimar. P: Joel Simon, Bill Todman Jr. EP/D: Joe Dante. Fox.

Zen. Film. AN series. RS.

Zorro. Film. S: Nancy Larson. TriStar. LA TV series. F. Chan. AN TV series. Nel. Broadway musical. P: Fox, Nederlander.

The Thing: Trademark & Copyright 1993 Marvel Entertainment Group Photo: Courtesy Everett Burrell

Now, he's the Thing. That's how he'll look, as created by the Optic Nerve Studio, in the new *Fantastic Four* film.



Carol Kane (replacing Judith Malina as Granny) and Joan Cusack (as the nanny) join the cast for a sequel, *The Addams Family Values*.

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Written & illustrated by Jim Lee, Deathblow is the ultimate mercenary! With a stunning embossed black varnish cover, **Deathblow #1** will be hot!

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By popular demand, the **Wild Cats Trade** contains issues 1-4 plus a limited **Wild Cats #0**!

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All new series by Jim Lee! Hot!

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Pencilled by Jack "King" Kirby with inks by Liefeld, Lee, McFarlane, Larsen & Williams! Polybagged with 1 of 5 different trading cards!

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The return of Superman! 64 pages!		
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New story! Includes lots of pin-ups!		

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